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# ROCCABELLA:

## A TALE

## OF A WOMAN'S LIFE.

BY PAUL BELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.

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# DEDICATORY.

TO THE AUTHOR OF "AURORA LEIGH."

More than half of the following tale was told, on paper, some years ago. It was then my intention, being the eldest-born of the Phantom family, to inscribe it to Currer Bell—as my pleading in the argument of a question so passionately referred to in "Jane Eyre" and "Shirley." But losses of dear friends by death—discouragements justly or unjustly incurred—and the falling away of some on whom reliance had been implicit—came in merciless succession; and the fancy and the heart stopped—and, with them, the pen.—I never thought to finish this tale. But the humour came back not long ago, and (for better, for worse) the history is here brought to a close.

There is always something of melancholy in returning to an interrupted task, whatever may have caused the interruption. During my pause, the gifted woman to whom I meant to inscribe this story has gone to rest. The stirrings of her busy heart have ceased—her vivid imaginings have melted away in the shadows of the valley. But in resuming a labour long laid aside, I did not find that I had any words to unsay; because the thoughts which my earlier ones had expressed or symbolized had been of late thought out by others in another and a better form.—Time, and added experience of life, and sorrow, add earnestness, perhaps, in proportion as they dim the hopeful spirit under which the younger aspirant commences his work; but it has been my lot to find few things bad which I found good—no matter how many years ago—or *vicé versâ*. Constancy in prejudice, constancy in pursuit, however, are in my poor case accompanied by constancy in admira-

tion; and thus, to one whom I have long held to be the most distinguished of women gifted for poetical authorship whom England has ever produced, this plain, but perhaps not untruthful, story of a woman's heart is, in all sincere respect, dedicated by her old friend,

PAUL BELL.

*August*, 1859.

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# ROCCABELLA.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE HUSBAND.

A BEAUTIFUL and still young woman was musing betwixt chimney-corner and window, about five o'clock on one of the dreariest afternoons of a certain November, 18—, in a sitting-room, commanding for prospect a street of bygone fashion in the town of Liverpool.—The huge fire was burning as fires burn only in Lancashire. The apartment which it lit up, draperied with mellow-coloured hangings, and fitted with every appliance for comfort, made a picture which may have struck a pang to the heart of many a bleak, care-crazed creature passing by, lured to stop and look in by the brilliancy of the light and the richness of the colours. The lady's dress was in harmony with her habitation ; but whether a face wearing a

more painful expression could have been found on that afternoon throughout the wide seaport town of Liverpool, is doubtful. Unhappiness—consciousness of imprisonment—something of rebellion, even—were in every line of it. The brow was knit with a heavy frown; and the lips worked and talked, though there was no one to see or to hear. The servant who entered, and who was obliged three times to say, "If you please, ma'am, my master has sent up word that two gentlemen are coming to dinner," ere his mistress turned, and gave the needful orders—would have profited little by her soliloquy had he heard it; supposing it possible that the same had arranged itself after the complete and explanatory fashion of the stage.

It would have told merely the old tale, of unexplained desires, of blanked sympathies, of an entangled, profitless life,—in which so many a woman's confessions would be summed up. Rosamond was, beyond expression, sick of a monotonous existence, passed among people with whom she had nothing in common. She wished to be earning her own bread: she longed for excitement—for

London—for foreign travel; to talk with poets and persons of genius—to escape from the stupifying dinners of eighteen, and the inanity of balls, at which every body was too grand—or not grand enough—to enjoy themselves. She hated herself that she had been entrapped into such a thraldom for life as this. She almost hated him who had done it—a man who could not comprehend her nature—who was satisfied if she was superbly clothed and luxuriously fed, and whose family and whose associates always eyed her as though she had stood between somebody else and good fortune. There was her harp—but who cared to hear it? There were her books; but the more she read them, the worse became her malady. To whom could she dare to tell the thoughts which they set fermenting in her busy, sleepless mind? Mrs. A—— would call her insane; Mrs. B—— a monster of ingratitude, recollecting that she had been an orphan, and a poor relation to boot, married so regally, and with every wish, almost, granted! Mrs. C—— would condole with her husband, there and then. Mrs. D——, E——, and F—— would threaten to "cut her," and

keep their words, until such time as her next dinner-cards were sent out. Mrs. G—— would drench her with tracts, and the offer to bring down upon her a silky-spoken clergyman, whom she could not admire nor endure. Mrs. H—— would cry over her, wish that Heaven had blessed her sweet friend with a child. Mrs. I—— would flatter her with that false vulgar flattery which nearly drove her beyond patience and civility. And she was to go on to the end of her days in this way—listless and miserable and alone!—There was wretched, driving sleet without; the black mud was ankle deep in the street. No sound was to be heard, save the heavy drays and water-side carts as they lunged past, and the sharp approach of the post-man's bell, as he sped along collecting letters—some, she thought, for London! In after days the ideas which passed through Rosamond's mind during that hour made her shudder and wonder.

"What shall I lay out for you, ma'am?" was her maid's question. "My black silk." Rosamond was fond of dressing in black; and that day her approach to mourning was

even deeper than usual;—since, feeling chill, she threw round her a large shawl of Chantilly lace, before she descended to the drawing-room. The announced guests were two, and one gentleman beside—Mr. Oliphant, her husband's solicitor. The others, presented to her in a voice to which she did not take the pains to attend, were for her merely anonymous men—strangers, however—and she perceived by their accent not belonging to Lancashire. One of them, of course, took her down to dinner.

The strong lamp-light thrown upon the table gave Rosamond a passing impression that her husband's guests were something different from, if not superior to, the generality of those who sat beside her. One—whom the other two called "Doctor"—looked worn with shrewdness, she thought—yet had curiously settled, not to say, set expression of countenance. The other eat an outrageous dinner, and seemed capable of falling asleep while he was eating it, and what he said was the merest commonplace in substance; yet there was a more than ordinary decision in his manner of asking for bread, and a screen, and of inquiring when the new Borough

Courts would be finished. Neither the smooth nor the strong visiter (thus they involuntarily presented themselves to Rosamond's apprehension) made any remarkable efforts for her entertainment; and on her side she was too indifferent to exert herself.—Mr. Oliphant's three jokes, and one good story, she knew by heart; and they came as usual without being asked for. Accordingly, having sat for the proper length of time, abstracted, silent, and what most people would have thought haughty, Rosamond retired to the monotonous comfort of her drawing-room, neither quickened, nor cheered, nor refreshed,—nor even her curiosity stirred as to the nature and errand of her husband's guests. In truth, she had hardly quitted the desert of her own dreary meditations, to which she now returned with that eagerness which partakes of the nature of self-torment. It grew late, but no candles were lighted. The frivolous occupation for her fingers, which seemed to occupy her wholly, could be done as well in darkness as in daylight; and if the shuttle were to pause for a week, what matter? She had no idea what might be the time, when her attention was arrested

by the sound of a carriage stopping suddenly at the door. Half unconscious what she did, Rosamond hastened to the window just in time to see a pair of dark figures (the dinner guests) disappear into it, and to hear the door shut to, and the direction "Lime Street Station" hastily given. The vehicle was gone, and all was still again.

The direction did Rosamond no good. Her fancy, too, was flying along the "London road," *towards* what she could only vaguely dream;—*from* what, she knew well, and with a familiarity which almost took the form of loathing. Possibly, in the confessions from which this account of the state of her mind is derived, Rosamond exaggerated her weariness and discontent. Women are apt to do so, when they call attention to their own past emotions,—sometimes out of penitence, sometimes from their desire for sympathy.

Another hour elapsed, and still no lights were brought in, the certain prelude of Mr. Westwood's ascent from the dining-room. "He will not want me, if he should come up to tea," at last said the weary wife, rousing herself as she retired to her own sanctuary

for the night. There, when the maid was shut out, Rosamond knew that she might unhesitatingly give herself up to the company of her own thoughts, without fear of disturbance or intrusion.—Among other bad habits of self-indulgence, she had contracted that of reading in bed,—"reading herself to sleep," was the pretext. That night the new French novel, temptingly placed on the little table with its green velvet cover, was flown to with unusual avidity; so many were the discontents which it seemed to utter for her—so excellently did all its highly coloured scenes of storm and passion suit her impatient and undisciplined spirit!

The tale was one of a woman like herself, ill-married—mated to wealth, hard calculation, and unrefined stubbornness. Other figures were in the masque, painted, to borrow a fanciful simile, as if the artist had used the prismatic fire-tints of the volcano. Rosamond did not know how long she had read, till, on closing the second volume, the silver chime of her pendule tolled out "two o'clock."

She paused breathless with terror—not at the lateness of the hour, but because of

another sound—the sound of a slow foot upon the stairs, which also paused before her door; and because of the hoarse voice which an instant afterwards said, "Your light is burning; you are awake. May I come in?"

A little sofa covered with gay chintz stood at the foot of her bed. On this the husband sat himself slowly down—a dull, dark, heavy shape.

After pausing for a moment, "Do you know," said he abruptly, "who those two men were that dined here?"

"No, sir," was the trembling answer.

"One was ———," and Mr. Westwood named a famous London surgeon. The other was Mr. Bessell,—a London solicitor of like eminence.

"I did not catch their names," replied the wife.

"I did not fancy you did; with your mind set upon other things as it is, I do not wonder. . . . But you may have cause to remember the day they dined here."

"Good God! Mr. Westwood, is any thing of consequence the matter?"

"Yes," was the gloomy answer, "to me of consequence enough. You would feel it of

consequence, Rosamond, to be told that you had a bare fortnight to live, or thereabouts,—if you had as many concerns to see after and to settle as I have."

Rosamond's first idea was that her husband was in liquor. But she knew that he never drank to excess. Her second thought was one of blended amazement, horror;—remorse, too, as if a spear had passed through the very centre of her heart,—but not of grief.

"You are shocked, no doubt, Rosamond, for we take such little notice of each other,"—harsher and more mournful grew the voice as it said these words—"that the thing might easily have happened before it struck you that I looked worse in health than usual. But there is little doubt about the matter. This day three weeks I shall be in the churchyard; and you will have the world before you again."

Rosamond tried to speak, but no words would come. "I thought, first," he went on, "I would write it to you; but I shall have too much to write as it is, and words are the simplest. I wish to consult you before my will is finally drawn out; and this is why I came in."

Still no kind word from the agitated woman. O, it was impossible that her first kind word to her husband could come *then!*

"Thank you, Mrs. Westwood," he resumed, "for letting me go on steadily. It hurts me now to raise my voice long at a time. I suppose you have no idea of what money I have to leave. How much would satisfy you?"

"O, sir! in Heaven's blessed name I beseech you, do not think—do not speak of such things. It cannot—it shall not be . . . . . as you say! No one can tell. They are mistaken. Cases of mistake are perpetually occurring! Why should we not go to London ourselves, at once, for other advice? No one can have any right to pronounce upon life and death! It is hideous! It is wicked!" And down rained the tears, which had been only wanting an excuse to rain down.

"No! he is right enough. It is all true —I have thought so myself for some weeks; but I wished to be sure. There is no use in being distressed: nothing can be done. I must face the next world; but

before I face it I will try to settle my affairs in this one like a just man. About the money,—how much will make you comfortable, Rosamond?"

Faster and more passionate became her sobs—till a grave, almost a stern, "Pray be still," rebuked them into silence. "I cannot go on until you are calmer. This is what I mean to arrange. You can hear it, turn it in your mind, and let me know—any time before four o'clock to-morrow afternoon, will do.

"You know that you are not on terms with my family. It is not your fault. I am aware that, if you had tried to please them ever so much, they would never have forgiven our marriage. I was the favourite with Anne; and Jane, and George, and Robert made sure of having all my property amongst them. If you had brought a fortune into the concern, indeed . . . . but as it is, the breach will never be made up; and I must have matters properly settled, or they will dispute every thing that is done for you, and torment you out of your life."

Again did Rosamond entreat her husband not to mention such topics—not to think

of her—not to humble her so: but again he begged her to be silent—almost sternly. His time and composure were precious.

"You know that when we married," continued Mr. Westwood, "you would not hear of any settlement. I thought it very handsome of you. It seemed to me a proof that you could not merely be marrying for money. But the wisest of us may be mistaken. Both you and I have been so. You would have been happier out in the world, earning your bread, than cooped up here as a Liverpool fine lady. And I . . . . . but you will be all the better off now, for not having been eager then. It is but just. I shall leave you four thousand a-year, in the hands of men I can rely upon as trustees. There's as much again to be divided among the rest of them, even if they were not rich enough already—but they will grudge you your share, and so I shall have it put high and dry beyond their reach."

"I cannot! I will not!" . . . .

"You must keep yourself calm for a little moment longer, Rosamond: I have much besides this to arrange, and they ordered me to avoid agitation as much as

possible. But, my dear, in leaving you this money, which I hope will enable you to gratify all your reasonable wishes,—I should be guilty if I were to expose you to the chances of a second match, which should turn out as bad a one as ours has been. You'll be courted for your fortune; and if you are married upon it, no good will come to either you or the man who does it. It is to go from you when you marry again. That is what I had to say—think it over, and if you find it will not answer, let me hear.—I wish to consider every body—you particularly—now; and to do what is fair and friendly. Pray be still. I have said what I wanted ; and you can sleep upon it."

The dull, dark, heavy shape got slowly up from the gay little sofa. The door was shut, the steps died away, and Rosamond was left alone, in the midst of a storm of distressful and conflicting thoughts, such as are not to be described. Were her feelings most largely those of wonder, or terror, or remorse? Had distaste a share in them—a sense of injustice and of generosity curiously blended—a conviction within herself, that with all the superiority of her uncouth,

unlovely husband over herself, in the scene just closed, he had studied retaliation as well as forgiveness?—not in the condition of his bequest!—O no, for the retaining or the loss of fortune were of no more consequence to Rosamond, than so many things that might pass in another hemisphere—but in his harsh, formal, stern manner of announcing it—in his predetermined resolution to hear no pleadings, no qualifications of hers!—Should she not write and decline the gift? Ah! she knew well that that would not avail—it would be despised as theatrical: as a piece of acting got up by one who well knew that it would not deceive or persuade its object. I love my heroine well: but truth is truth—and few, too few, were the thoughts of compassion and regard which suggested themselves in favour of the toil-broken, dying man, who was spending his last hours of life, howsoever ungracefully, in making an equitable and considerate distribution of his vast wealth. She was perverse; and bitterly, bitterly in after days did she recall and repent of her perversity—when repentance availed nothing.

Such is the end—had people only the honesty to admit it—of too many a match for money—cruel misunderstanding, if not worse; dogged, implacable, and placed by its own pride beyond the reach of late relenting, concession, and forgiveness!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HUSBAND'S RELATIONS.

WITHIN three weeks from this time I was summoned to Liverpool, to be present at the reading of Mr. Westwood's will, by his solicitor, Mr. Oliphant—I was one of Rosamond's trustees, though but distantly related to her: a second cousin once removed, or something of the kind. Yet I was the nearest male relation—almost the solitary relation of either sex whom she possessed. Her mother, the only daughter of an only daughter distantly connected with my parents, had married when she was forty; and had been left a widow before Rosamond was born. This had happened in the East Indies. We none of us had known much of her husband, beyond the fact that he was an Italian or Spaniard, who had entered the English service. Mrs. de Castro spoke of him

reluctantly. Her marriage had proved a failure; and before she returned to Europe, with a small life-interest in some property to live upon, and her daughter to educate and marry, she had assumed that demeanour which distances question and sympathy. Never have I seen so unapproachable a woman. She was as stately as a queen, and as spirited as a lioness. But the illness of which she died was protracted for four years; and when at last she was released—so far from any personal property being left for the use of her orphan, a few friends had absolutely to join in providing for the expenses of her funeral. Thus Rosamond had come to us barely because she had nowhere else to go to,—till some interest made by the gentleman with whose house of business I have been for many years connected, led to her being engaged partly as governess, partly as companion by Mrs. Chidley, eldest sister of Mr. Westwood, a great Liverpool merchant. In an evil day, he was captivated by her beauty—offered to marry her—and in an evil day, (we said so at least, who had never been obliged, as my wife puts it, "to wrestle with Mrs. Chidley's temper,") Rosamond married

Mr. Westwood. Their union had lasted seven years. The poor girl "had served her time" in learning what a marriage without love could produce. She had rushed into the connection without thought—or, possibly, in a fit of sudden irritation under harassing usage. Now the prison door was set open —now she was free to go thence, as the world would phrase it, in triumph!

It was with great inconvenience to myself that I got over to Liverpool—nothing doubting all the time, but that I had been summoned as a mere matter of form, and that what Mr. Oliphant had told to Rosamond, and had notified to me, had also been communicated to Mr. Westwood's family. They knew I was aware that their sister-in-law had no marriage settlement—they knew, too, that I knew how cordially they disliked her; the pretext of such dislike being that she had failed to make their dear brother happy. I had been invited to attend the funeral, but could not manage it; and thus I did not arrive at the house till considerably after mid-day—a few moments before the business proceedings were to commence. It could not have been Rosamond I was sure, who

had proposed that Mr. Westwood's will should be read aloud.

In the drawing-room I found Mr. Oliphant, my brother trustee—George and Robert Westwood—Mrs. and Mr. Chidley (of them one never said, "Mr. and Mrs."), and Mrs. James Rick, the other married sister—a widow. This last-named lady needed neither legal adviser nor male relative in protection of her interests. She was a meek woman to look upon, and to listen to; with a pink complexion approaching to lilac spread over her face; flat blue eyes, profuse flaxen hair—a long mouth with full lips, and a gentle stoop, which seemed to appeal for forbearance. Betwixt her and Mrs. Chidley there was little agreement; for the one was a flaunting dame of the Liverpool world, and the other a gentlewoman devoted to a close attendance at St. Andrew's Church—who took out *her* gaiety and excitement at missionary meetings, and parties at which, as my wife said, want of charity was expounded out of the Scriptures. A sweeter voice than Mrs. Rick's I never heard: perhaps it was too honied.

"Do you think, George," said she to the brother whom she always addressed in pre-

ference, "that the reading had better go on, if Mrs. Westwood prove too ill to leave her room to-day?"

"Humph!" was the answer; "Oliphant, a pinch of snuff. Mr. Bell, 'tis very good of you to come all this way to us on such a melancholy occasion."

"I suppose, Jane," was Mrs. Chidley's caustic rejoinder, "that *you* have nothing better to do than to make appointments and break them—being one of the over-righteous. Mrs. Westwood, I imagine, will be glad enough to be released from suspense with regard to her future: and *I* shall be relieved if I learn that my brother has made some small settlement on her, since I confess that money concerns betwixt sisters-in-law are ungracious things—but I fear" . . . . .

I saw Mr. Oliphant's lip curl at Mrs. Chidley's fear, and mention of the "small settlement." The two men jerked out their watches. The five made up a commonplace, unfeeling group; and I was beginning to feel hot, and nervous, and treacherous to my charge by saying nothing in the widow's behalf—when the door quietly opened, and in walked Rosamond. She bowed to her husband's

unsympathetic relatives—shook hands with me as she thanked me for coming—adding, in a low voice, "This painful arrangement is not of my choosing"—and then took her seat.

I had not seen Rosamond for four years; and was dazzled by the development of her beauty, which had taken place within that period. Not only had her form filled up, but her face had in some degree changed. A character had appeared in it different to any thing I had seen there before: a certain self-possession and command, telling of passion suppressed, not indulged. Her queenly air rebuked the manners of the two other women, and they felt it. They sat smaller after their superb sister-in-law walked in. She had prepared her composure—or, rather, she had hardened herself against all exhibition of emotion—since the widow's cambric handkerchief, ready for tears, was not in her hand; but a certain strange, picturesque air was imparted by a breadth of crape, that fell over her white cap, neck, and shoulders, after the fashion of a mantilla; and it gave to her dismal dress a yet more shadowy and nun-appearance than is the wont of the widow's doleful uniform.

Mr. Oliphant began to read. The loss of a tooth hampered his articulation: besides, he was habitually slow, and seemed *to bore* his way along the parchment lines through his spectacles;—but never was play, in which Siddons kept her thousand subjects enthralled, followed with such rapacious interest as was that formal document by five of the listeners. I was eager, too;—but, having been apprized that Rosamond was royally cared for, my eagerness was to mark the effect of the bequest upon the others. They sat, with necks craned forward, mouths half open, eyes glistening, hands alert to the finger-tips, while the drowsy, dreary preamble was droned out—a composition as long and tedious as if those who framed it had determined to show the world how the clearest intention could be expanded over the largest surface. I saw, even, a certain smile of satisfaction steal over the face of "Mrs. James"—a smile of one satisfied that the work had been thoroughly done, and that Law had tied money fast, beyond dispute or untying.

But the longest preamble has its period: after the preamble came the bequests. The

first in the schedule was Rosamond's four thousand a-year.

"Mr. Oliphant!" exclaimed Mrs. Chidley, violently pushing back her chair.

"I am afraid I don't make myself heard," said the matter-of-fact solicitor—"owing to this rheumatism on the left side of my head and face. Perhaps I had better read that clause again."

"I understand every thing perfectly," said the more Christian Mrs. Rick, with dagger, bowl, and burial-without-benefit-of-clergy, in her better modulated tones. "Surely there is no occasion to trouble dear Mr. Oliphant, as he reads with difficulty—unless Mrs. Westwood would like to hear the clause a second time."

"Not on my account, madam," replied a steady voice from behind the veil.

"Are we doing business here, or are we *not?*"—vociferated the elder sister, who was apt to lose her self-command on such occasions. "I must hear that again. I make a point of it.. The idea is so monstrous, that we may well desire to be convinced of its reality."

"You will discuss the subject with more

freedom in my absence," said the widow. "I appeared here in compliance with the wishes of Mr. Westwood's family; but I am not prepared to-day for having his bequests canvassed. If there is any thing of immediate consequence which I am required to know—Mr. Bell, I trust to your kindness to acquaint me. Meanwhile, this is not my place." And Rosamond rose and retired.

"There, Anne!" said the sanctimonious lady, looking first to see that the door was shut. "Consider what your impetuosity has done—afforded another fellow-creature excuse for withdrawing from her duties! Think what we may on any given subject, we should bridle that unruly member the tongue . . . . Perhaps, however, you wish to break with our dear brother's widow?"

"Perhaps you wish to make friends with your dear brother's wife *now?*" was the tart rejoinder. "We all know Mrs. Rick of old. But, my dear! *you* know *I* don't pretend to being religious like you, my dear! nor to forgiving my enemies when they come in for grand legacies, my dear!—and you know I cannot wear two faces under a hood, nor go on admiring folks when I despise them, my

dear!—I'll never believe but that all that henbane our poor dear brother took affected his intellect; and, before I sit down contentedly under such a piece of spoliation as this, my dear! I shall see what Dr. Glossop has to tell us on the subject, my dear!—Yes; and Mrs. Westwood's trustee—Mr. Bell, I believe, is the person's name, sir—may hear what I say—every word he may, my dear!—and he may put it down with a pencil if he likes, and he may read it to your *dear* brother's wife if he likes. Speak out I must, and speak out I will!—and I say it's atrocious, however it may suit you to set up a pious prayer-meeting face over it, just as if you never had heard any thing which pleased you so delightfully, my dear!"

"*My dear*" lifted up her eyes in the most dove-like way imaginable; shutting her mouth though, as one shuts a purse with a hard iron snap. I saw her foot trembling under her broad crape hem, but answer made she none to this torrent of Mrs. Chidley's vituperation. "Mr. Oliphant," was her only reply, "will you oblige us by going on?"

The unready solicitor, not made readier by the hurricane which had broken out so

near him, proceeded to read the condition annexed to Rosamond's heritage. If Mrs. Westwood married again, her income was immediately to be withheld by her trustees: who had received sealed instructions how, in case of such an event, to dispose of it.

"And what sort of sealed instructions, pray?" broke in the shrew, in a voice half a tone shriller than before. "Sealed instructions, indeed! Perhaps, Mrs. Rick, my dear! you will favour us with their contents. A lady who can expound all the books of the Revelations, the nine vials, and the twelve seals, and the Great Beast"—(I am afraid Mrs. Chidley was not much of a reader of her Bible)—"can be at no loss to tell us what's under the seal. Though doubtless, you don't know, my dear!—any more than ourselves—and though of course you *weren't* consulted; nor you, Mr. Oliphant, sir; nor you, Mr. Bell, sir! O pray go on, the confederacy is charming!"

"Ma'am," said I, "Mr. Oliphant wishes to go on: and we wish to hear him, if you would allow us. Pray, reserve your remarks till the close."

"And who are you, sir, pray, to cut me

short? Mr. Westwood's sister—his favourite sister! I have a right to make as many remarks as I please, and I shall—and I will—and I will be called to account by nobody—and I will not be trampled upon, so long as there is law in the land, or a man in Liverpool (I don't speak of the present company), to protect me!"

I could now understand why Rosamond had married,—and began absolutely to imagine that that angry, red-faced woman would try to do some of the party bodily mischief. But at the last clause of her appeal Mrs. Chidley broke out into a sob, the subsiding of which gave the reader, who looked as impassive as a sack of wool, an opportunity to proceed. Of this he availed himself. We were subsequently informed how all the plate was left to Rosamond, because it was engraved with her cipher—add to which an ample sum of ready money; also all the furniture of her own two particular rooms—nothing else in the house. Her husband's portrait in the drawing-room was separately bequeathed to Mrs. Rick. To me the whole document breathed a strange tone of mingled retribution, foresight—and tenderness.

You may be spared the rest of Mr. Westwood's will, to which I gave little ear: being impatient to speak to the poor widow, endowed and insulted in one and the same breath—and uncertain as to the manner in which she would receive her new fortunes, or as to the stability of character which she had acquired during her married life. It would not be easy to advise her—and how would she rule herself?

It might be some augury of her relations with me, that after the close of the reading a tap on the door from Rosamond's maid summoned me to her presence.—I found my relative agitated, pale, and trembling. "You see my position, Cousin Bell," said she. "Is it not a strange one? Is it not a sad one? I am virtually left alone in the world!"

There was no possibility just then of replying that riches would buy her friends—still less of representing to her that there were in the world such humble people as ourselves, who had long been her friends already—friends neither bought nor *to be* bought.

"And to be ill spoken of!" continued Rosamond; "and to be insulted, to be followed

with hatred because of this trashy money. O it is hideous! hideous!"

"Do not let your mind dwell upon such things, my dear Mrs. Westwood. He who is gone"—(I knew not how else to name her dead husband)—"was well aware of the tempers and dispositions of those whom he left behind him; and therefore, in his kind solicitude for you, placed your happiness and peace beyond their control. Nobody has any power to torment you. Yours *is* a strange position, and your spirits are shaken: but they will revive with time"—(I was going to say "soon," but bit the word off my tongue.) "Your happiest—*perhaps* your happiest days are to come."

"Ah! I do not think so—*I ought not* to think so! Don't mistake me, kind cousin; don't fancy me detestable enough to wish to impose upon you by presenting myself as an inconsolable widow. It is not so! and I wanted to say this to them. I must say it to *you*. It is not so! I am crushed, overwhelmed. I hate myself. I am distressed beyond what can be told: but I will not be a hypocrite! It is not by his loss. It is by his munificence! and," she continued with increasing vehe-

mence, "if I do not, if I *cannot* feel, and if I will not pretend to feel, what one who has loved devotedly should and *must* feel, am I to blame? Am I a wicked creature? Am I ungrateful? If those people had treated me, for his sake, with common forbearance—how gladly, how humbly, would I have begged them to share all this money among them, and would have gone out again to work for my livelihood!"

"Ah, Rosamond! you were always Quixotic. What good would such a sacrifice do you? They do not need it."

"And they do not deserve it! Nor would it, now, relieve my own mind—and I think the most of *that*. So, let them speak of me as they please—so let them spread it about that I cajoled their brother's money out of him: perhaps even shortened his days!"

"Good heavens! do not let your mind run riot, among such terrible fancies! Why think of them at all? You have kept apart from them, and they from you. You will do so still. He wished you should. He made this provision expressly to enable you to do so. But why should such considerations occur to you on a day like this?—

"Should it not," I said more gently, "be devoted to other thoughts?" for in truth, during all that sad scene—Rosamond's share of it included—nothing was sadder to me than the haste with which the Dead had passed out of memory and regret!

"You do not know," was her reply. "You cannot imagine how I have been tormented, from without and from within, or you would wonder little at my state of mind. I . . . . Hush! there is some one at the door." She rung the bell and her maid entered—"See who it is, Nelkson,"—making a mute gesture to forbid *my* stirring, or taking any part.

A sweet voice in whispered parley with the maid was heard. "Is not that Mrs. Rick?" said Rosamond in a tone the control of which surprised me. "Pray, come in, madam."

Libraries have been written on the arts and airs of women as employed to subjugate men. Who has enumerated one tithe of the devices of woman bent on mortifying woman? Who has fathomed the length of her line, the windings of her web, in any case where antipathy towards one of her own sex employs the concealments or revelations, which are generally

undertaken to subjugate the other one? The sound of Mrs. Rick's small foot outside the door charmed Rosamond's sincere agitation into a quietness, which would have earned her the reputation of a consummate actress with those who have never considered that Woman's nature is changeful, and constancy sometimes her art. The storm had passed—and in place of the tossing waves there was now only ice.

It was no easy matter to puzzle Mrs. Rick, who generally saw clearly—howsoever it might please her to speak dubiously, and to work crookedly. The tract headed "Trials and their Mission," which she carried in her hand, like her look of blended solemnity, sympathy, admonition, and resignation, were but so many unimportant *properties* (as the players say) of her craft;—to be changed at a moment's warning for others, as the case might call for. But to decide in what manner she could bring herself to bear upon the widow was less easy. How was she to undo seven years' work? how to ascertain the mood of one who sat in her chair tearless as a statue, proud as a queen, polite as a court lady? To fix herself upon Rosamond's

four thousand a-year was Mrs. Rick resolved: and, to the credit of her decision, such resolution had come simultaneously with the announcement of the legacy; yet she was not sure that she was right in her first step—in this immediate claim for a conference, which was so mechanically admitted.—No suitable text presented itself by way of opening; she remembered that quotations of Scripture had always made Rosamond stony. "I feel a difficulty," began Mrs. Rick in a hesitating voice—"as if I was an intruder upon you, my dear Mrs. Westwood; . . . yet I could not leave this house till I had expressed to you, before your *friend* and *counsellor*"—Mrs. Rick's tone on those words was modulated with wondrous nicety—"my disapproval of our unhappy sister's manner of proceeding and of expressing herself!"

"There was no occasion for explanation," replied Rosamond quietly. "I cannot suppose that one person necessarily influences a family; and let me say, any thing like peace with Mr. Westwood's relations must be even more my wish than their's.—Thank you for coming up, if to make peace you come."

Mrs. Rick offered no answer till she had

tried for a tear, and got the same accomplished. "Such is indeed my wish, sister!" was her honeyed response. "We have all much, too much, to reproach our poor humanity with! I have not done what I might, or *ought*, as regards you—I am sorry for it."

Poor Rosamond! if she could have accomplished a tear then, by way of rejoinder, the effect would have been capital, and sisterly. But she could only bow;—for she sickened at the falsity of this fawning speech, and was too truthful to pretend even to act a part in the desired scene, for appearance's sake. Her sister-in-law was alive to the check. Immediate penitence and tenderness, then, were not the mood, it was clear. What should she try?

"You must have been surprised at my dear brother's disposition of his property," was Mrs. Rick's next venture.

"I am not!" replied the widow. "Your brother consulted me on the subject some weeks ago; and totally declined to listen to my remonstrances against such unparalleled and unmerited generosity."

"O!" with a due look of admiration, and another tear—exclaimed the sweet-voiced

lady. Mrs. Rick was too clever a woman not to believe Rosamond, but never had she loved her less than at that moment—"O! his confidence in those he loved was child-like;—and he knew well whom he had to deal with."

"No, truly, he did not,!" replied the other, sharpened by this indelicacy in pursuit of a subject so delicate,—"if you mean me! Nor did I know myself till to-day. I never conceived it possible that I could accept so heavy an obligation. Now I feel it my duty to employ this wealth of his for honourable, generous purposes; and accordingly I have yielded up my inclinations to reject his legacy, —and will submit to be humbled."

Thoughts of Mrs. Rick's father-confessor —the Reverend Mr. Caleb Wheazeley— crossed that lady's mind. "What if Rosamond were taking a Dorcas fit, when might he be brought forward? But no: Mrs. Rick was a clever woman. She knew such a change could not have taken place, at least so suddenly—but she sighed all the same—and dropped a few manna-like commonplaces, on "the duty and the privilege, and the blessing of improving our time in holy and

charitable actions,—although poor works, it is true," &c., &c. . . . By those who excuse theology in novels, my abbreviation will be felt as welcome.

"But," continued the manœuvrer, "you have at least considered the future, I trust, my dear sister—so far as to have decided on some plan—let me hope, for your own sake, not that of living alone."

"I have decided on nothing, Mrs. Rick, save immediate change of residence. I have never liked this place; the air disagrees with me—I have no friends here. To-morrow . . . . . but I shall finally settle myself in or near London."

Another shock to Mrs. Rick, who had that strange jealousy and awe of all belonging to Babylon, which people so eminently provincial as herself rarely fail to possess!—Those few words showed her how soon and irrecoverably Rosamond's thousands a-year would be out of her reach.—One solitary chance remained to her: "Then, if you have not fixed upon a companion, my dear sister, surely I could be of some little use; could I not?—There must be inquiries to be made; there must be valuable persons in abundance

to whom a position near you would be *such* a blessing!"

"I wish I thought I could make it so," said Rosamond, in a less constrained voice;—with a sigh of retrospection and of consciousness.

"I wish, then," continued Mrs. Rick, emboldened by this momentary thaw, "that I might mention to you the case of Miss Dillington, the daughter of Mrs. Seth Dillington; the sweetest character I have ever known, and who has borne her reverses in such a truly Christian spirit!—You must have seen her at my house. Once, I know, she was coming when you were to be there. If you are not already decided, do let me interest you for Miss Dillington. She will look up to you so."

"I have decided," replied Rosamond colouring, and resuming her haughty and constrained tone, "so far as this;—that no one having connections in Liverpool would be agreeable to me as a companion. But forgive me, Mrs. Rick, for declining to enter upon these subjects to-day.—Before the dead are well buried out of our sight, there is something to me strangely heartless and painful

in scheming, and managing, and settling business. My cousin's time here is valuable, and this is my excuse for troubling him;—otherwise I would gladly have passed the few first hours of my widowhood in quietness."

Mrs. Rick made no reply save by her handkerchief. Business being declined, perhaps it might not be altogether amiss to outgrieve the widow.—The sister's little sobs were very moving ; and I found it hard to believe her the false woman which I had been told she was. "Ah, indeed!" she got out; "it *is* a loss for all of us, and I don't wonder to see you overcome. But we must bear up till we meet him again, and never forget that the arrow of suffering may be wreathed with the balsam of healing, if we receive chastisement in a right spirit."

From this second-hand consolation, one of Mr. Wheazeley's stock-pieces, and the fawning hand of the excellent woman laid upon her arm, Rosamond withdrew with a decision which I own seemed to me tinctured with sternness. On this Mrs. Rick, finding that she took little by sobbing without an assistant, wiped her eyes, tied her bonnet-strings, and got up from her chair. "There is nothing,

then, dear sister, that you will allow me to do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you!" was Rosamond's answer; "there is little in truth to be done,—and for the moment I feel that rest and silence are the most necessary to me. For all friendly intentions, believe me, I am sincerely grateful. Cousin, Mrs. Rick is going: will you see her to her carriage? and then come back to me, if you will be so kind." And thus the two parted.

As we went down-stairs, my disposition towards sympathy for Mr. Westwood's sobbing sister underwent mitigations.—Right, left, up, down, darted the eyes of Mrs. Rick. Two doors did she open, under pretext of their being the front door: and she murmured to herself, "An excellent house!" in a very mundane tone, which either meant to convey to me that I was a Nobody, whose esteem was not worth conciliating—or else was an involuntary outbreak, in innocent pride of heart. And I never heard woman rate a servant so mercilessly as Mrs. Rick, while scolding her huge, red-cheeked clod of a footman, for having forgotten her carriage boots.

"And that woman's brother was gone out

of the house to be buried to-day!" said I to myself, looking after Mrs. Rick's mildew-green chaise, with her metallic and distinct voice ringing in my ears. Slowly did I mount the stairs again, pondering many things:—what, for instance, the world would have had to say touching the two women whose curious interview I had witnessed, when my further passage upward was arrested. It was by Mrs. Nelkson, Rosamond's maid and *factotum*, a huge woman tightly cased in sables, who had always an ill-used face, and an oppressive command of grand words.

"My mistress presents her kindest regards, Mr. Bell, sir," said the Abigail, "and would you excuse coming up to animadvert with her again to-day.—She has just been in ecstasies, and thinks she shall be the better, sir, for a little sleep,—and seeing no company more sir."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE COMPANION.

Such were the leave-takings betwixt Rosamond and her husband's relations: such was her farewell to the home of her married life. On the failure of Mrs. Rick's attempt "to make peace" (as she called it), that Christian woman joined with the worldly Mrs. Chidley, in maintaining their rights, without the slightest pretext at grief for the deceased, or of consideration for his relict. The latter was apprized, within four-and-twenty hours after the scene which I had witnessed, that she was no longer in her own house. Proper persons were put in with a view to preventing removal of an iota of property beyond that which was bequeathed in the precise will of Mr. Westwood. These folk in possession had much to tell Mrs. Nelkson, concerning the violence and pertinacity with

which the hot and cold sister wrangled over the division of their share of the spoil. But Rosamond had long taught her Abigail to refrain from fetching or carrying gossip: and, though she was above the reach of such petty mortification or triumph, as the tale might have inflicted, she now reaped the reward of the prohibition, in going forth undisturbed by any minute knowledge of or contact with, such miserable proceedings.

There can be small question as to the acrimony with which (as my wife grotesquely put it) Rosamond's first step of independent action was "welcomed" by them.—How was such an offence to be forgiven, as her "taking up" with Manchester, after her contempt of Liverpool?—and choosing for her sole associates and counsellors the family of a manufacturer's poor book-keeper,—when the ladies of two first-class merchants were not found sufficiently high-flown and aristocratic to content her? Yet the widow's first move was absolutely to Mrs. Darby's first-floor, No. 80, Halcyon Row.—She declared that she made the move to be near us.—And near us Rosamond abode all the winter, and far

into the next year; though we knew that this was but a temporary measure;—a rest during the first period of her deep mourning, while she was making up her plans. Her sisters-in-law did not know this; still less could any power on earth have made them conceive how exhausting, not to say undesirable, proved to be the widow's neighbourhood: because I do suppose that with themselves money was the first, second, and third consideration,—besides, they were too old, as some one put it quaintly, "to profit by bad example."

With ourselves matters were otherwise. Riches have never been our first object.—We had young folks growing up round us; and Rosamond's presence in a quiet family, brought up on moderate expectations and in industrious habits, could hardly be otherwise than troubling. She proved as affectionate but as petulant also as a child—as munificent as a fairy; till it became needful to check this.—She was fond of startling ideas and audacious paradoxes; she loved talking, my Mrs. Bell assured her, for talking's sake; and of expressing herself in disparagement of that quiet middle-class life which

average men and women must prepare to lead. This she called the

"Waveless calm, the slumber of the dead."

She writhed under the social injustice which she saw around her, and some of which, too, she had felt :—but no, she would not own that even *she* had felt it—she had always, she now thought, risen above it. She would like to have a wand—and wings.

"Why, you have both already!" observed a quiet low-toned voice from the corner, where our third daughter (a particularly demure person, and small for her age) sat knitting. "Why, you have both; for you possess wealth and genius."

We started—my wife and I. This was the first time that Martha had ever been heard to take a flight of the kind; and it seemed an involuntary one—a piece of thinking aloud: for after she had spoken, fast shut to her mouth again, and she resumed her needles, just as busily as if she had not come out with a saying so unexpected; and, on the whole, a neat saying.

"Ah! Rosamond, you might have enough of your rod and your feathers, and sooner than

you think"—was my good woman's answer. "Power would be all well and good, if there were not such things as expectations, which one is expected to satisfy when one *has* the power."

"Expected! But why should any one expect any thing from me!—Or what? The more that people expected, the less I should do!—Ah! don't shake your head, and purse up your mouth, cousin. I would make it up in *such* surprises. I should take such a delight in finding out what every body I loved wanted, and in giving it them just at the right moment. And how I would punish foolish, wicked, hypocritical people—your proper pattern women—who are always exhorting, and exacting—always hating, and tormenting others, and pampering themselves with their own miserable pleasures—while they are always pretending to be so *terrified at every thing that is conspicuous.*"

I was truly glad that my children did not know that Rosamond here imitated Mrs. Rick's tone—nor did she herself. The mimickry was unconscious.—"Yes," continued she, warming, "What is there that a woman could not do, if she would—sup-

posing she had only half the privileges of men? Think, for instance, among our own sex, how" . . . . . The knitter here stopped for a moment, in breathless attention.

"Now, Mrs. Westwood," interrupted my wife, who had no particular desire that her daughters should enter into our guest's romantic views about women—"there, you know, we cannot soar after you. *We* have no wings, dear! And I only pray and trust that your enthusiastic temper may not bring its own sorrow and disappointment with it: for I am sure your objects will be generous and noble. In the meanwhile, suppose we drop to common earth — not to what woman could do, but to what you, being a woman, *will* do. Are you really satisfied about this London scheme of yours, and do you mean to pursue it? or have you contrived something else?"

"You want to get quit of me out of Halcyon Row," was the widow's half-sad, half-sprightly reply. "An idle, wayward creature, with no ties and no duties, *is* a sad tax upon every body, I know! Why should such as we cumber the ground? Yes: I will try London for a year or two; and, if

London will not do,—Paris or Naples. I have an idea that I should delight in Naples. Rome *must* be melancholy—and is too learned for me, at least until I have read and studied a great deal. Yes: Naples! The very first thing which I shall do when I get to London, will be to take an Italian master."

"An Italian! . . . . . I hope not before you have suited yourself with a companion," was the reply of my wife,—whom I have always accused of taking her notions of Italians from Mrs. Radcliffe's romances—and who is a trifle prudish to boot.

"No—you good, prudent, proper woman!" said Rosamond. "Not before every propriety has been satisfactorily considered! I *am* suited. That was one of my particular views in coming to be near you for awhile. Why, you think that I shall never do any thing useful or practical—or make myself into a woman of business. Quite wrong, you are, cousin! I *am* suited, and" (an exquisite expression of pleasure burst into her face as she spoke, with the tears into her eyes); "*there* sits my companion—your Martha!"

The shawl and its knitting-needles

dropped on the floor from my little daughter's hands.

"Nonsense, my dear, foolish, thoughtless Rose!" cried my wife, not believing the widow to be in earnest.—"It is no joke teaching poor folk, such as we are, to build air-castles. Our Martha there says little; but she has a long memory—and a brain, as she knows well, which I don't think it would be hard to turn!—Pray" . . . .

"I know—I know!" ran on Rosamond, full of her own kindly scheme. "And that is just why I will carry your Martha off with me, to turn her brain properly.—A quadrilateral woman you will never make your Martha, Mrs. Bell; plane, pinch, and polish her as much as you please! She shall come with me—she shall be my *chaperone* and care-taker. She shall be my sister; and I will provide for her."

O could only Mrs. James Rick have heard the proposal! But there are such things as wasted punishments, as well as disregarded blessings.—Mrs. Westwood's sister-in-law would at once have been aware that Rosamond was in earnest; the flutter of her manner merely arising from the difficulty

which she felt in announcing her intention, so as to represent herself in the light of the obliged party.—Yet my wife still regarded the scheme as a flight: and was, thereby, made more displeased than grateful.

"Dear Rosamond, you are a kind hare-brained creature! But you *should* reflect a little upon consequences. Girls are so easily unsettled: and, though we have every confidence in our Martha, we must not have her tried out of reason."

"But I am not trying—I am not unsettling," replied Rosamond, becoming more and more eager. "I am settling, cousin; settling for ever and a day. Surely you can't think me so giddy, so unfeeling! Surely . . . . cannot you see that I mean seriously what I say?"

We looked across to our demure little daughter. *She,* at all events, was well convinced that Mrs. Westwood was not joking. Her glance of appeal towards her mother and myself made the matter serious.

"You are in earnest?" at length my wife brought out.

"Truly I am! I will provide for Martha; if she is willing to trust herself with me."

I felt that the mother had the right first to speak, when the happiness of her daughter was in question—yet I knew that I must have the last word. Martha was our favourite child; though we never mentioned such a fact to the others.

My wife became almost ashey white with excitement. "Then, if you really are in earnest, Rosamond!" she began, "Paul and I can only thank you;—and thank you most kindly, for your generous intentions, while"—

"Mrs. Bell," put in the husband, "surely you and I must talk this matter over, before"—

"*After*, as much as you please, my dear, if you shortly come to a conclusion different from mine.—But first thoughts are best; and I wish my child to hear her mother say, from the first moment, eagerly, and earnestly, and solemnly;—that this cannot be. We must not part with her, even to you, dear Rosamond! We *could*, were it for her happiness—we *would*, whatever it cost any of us! But this, I am persuaded, would be for the happiness of nobody. Now speak, Mr. Bell—now, my dear!"

I confess I was surprised at my wife, though

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I ought to have known her unworldliness as well as her prudence; so often and so anxiously, when we lay awake at night, had we talked over the portionless estate of our daughters, and especially of this particular Martha!

"My love," was my answer, "I have nothing to add but to express my entire agreement in what you have said.—Our dear child knows well, I trust, that you would never stand in the way of her happiness."

"O but, mother!" cried the girl, rising from her chair, her cheeks glowing like fire, "before we decide" . . . . . .

"In an instant, darling—but hear what I have to say first. Rosamond, you are a good, grateful, generous being, my child, if ever there was one! And you know how I thank you, as much as if I could tell you;—and you know that it is not pride with me—and you know that it is not selfishness which prevents my accepting your offer, I hope.—No, I am sure it is not! But, were you to take our Martha, as you kindly propose, what would come of it? Why, listen; you want to wander about the world, and to try experiments as you call it,—and about these, Mr. Bell and

I should have something to say, if *she* was to make one of the party. But, bless you, my dear child—that won't last—take my word for it. Six months it won't last; even supposing that we agreed about its being a training fit for the life which our child is to lead. *You* will have other occupations, other interests. You must not trammel yourself. You may marry again—you will! Don't think me coarse for saying so!"

The widow grew angry, very angry. It became difficult for us to explain—though it was not difficult for us to comprehend, why that suggestion was one which she had a particular objection to entertaining. But my wife—surprised, let me add, by the suddenness of Rosamond's proposition—at once felt that entertained it must not be: and that we owed it to our child to shew *her* a good reason for instantaneous and final refusal. We had confidence in Martha's sense: here, however, was a temptation, and there were reasons amongst us why resistance to it was particularly necessary at that particular time. But Rosamond just then could—would—only see her immediate object; so she became much excited, to the point of saying injurious things respect-

ing parents who stood in the way of their children's prospects.

"Stop, my dear," interrupted my Mrs. Bell, "before you quite hate us! You know there is something else—you forget Martha's position with respect to Louis."

"Louis—I thought we should come to that! Louis, indeed! A precious objection! And so, in order that you may tie your child, hand and foot for life, to a mere commonplace country parson, you reject an offer which at least . . . . . Great parental kindness, truly! But"—her breast heaving as she went on—"I can speak, if ever woman could, of the guilt, of the wretchedness, of mistaken marriages. Yes, give your child to one who does not understand her, in place of giving her to me: and see what will come of it! If she have a life of misery, you are answerable for it!"

"You are not fair, Rosamond," replied my wife, kindling a very little. "Nor are the cases parallel. We do not wish our child to be rich; we do not pretend to screen her from the cares of life which her parents have enjoyed before her!"

"Enjoyed!"

"Only a slip of the tongue—and therefore

we do not object to her early marriage, which many people would fancy romantic enough, since the two, God knows, won't be overburdened with wealth. But we wish her to be healthy and happy. My love," turning to her daughter, "your father and I have the fullest trust in you. But this is a matter in which, supposing your feelings were to differ from ours, we must overrule you. One day you—ay, and you, too, Rosamond—will own that we have done right; and meanwhile we shall thank you all our lives long."

"Have *you* nothing to say for yourself?" said Rosamond, turning to our daughter, with the least possible accent of scorn in her voice. It might be that the accent was not lost on the girl;—since she merely bowed, (having already become more fiercely red when Louis was spoken of,) and replied with a great effort, "No, nothing . . . Thank you kindly, for thinking of me! . . . But my father . . . my mother . . . and" . . . . . .

"Then," cried Rosamond with a burst of irritability which was almost passionate, "my staying here another day is useless!—My example shall not injure your quiet household any longer . . . . Perhaps you are right,

however, all things considered. I shall go up to London to-morrow, alone" . . . and she forced a laugh as she added—"to seek my destiny alone;—since you all fling me off!"

We never liked to remember that last speech of hers, unreasonable as it was. Words "break no bones," it is true; but words can make pretty deep furrows of their own:—furrows of which deeds that come after remind poor folks many a time and oft.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FIRST HOURS IN LONDON.

If there ever existed woman, young, beautiful and rich, who arrived in London for the first time since her infancy, without a tumult of expectations hope and excitement too subtle to be analysed, and yet almost too strong to be borne with composure—that woman was at least not Rosamond Westwood. On the other hand, Nelkson, her maid, was disposed to be rather more than usually philosophical and dreary on the occasion—as they drove through one brilliantly lighted street after another, towards the Beaufort Hotel.

"Really, me'm, this is what may be called an inclement reception;—when a May night goes on pouring with rain and blowing with wind enough to drive a hurricane, exactly as if it was January! Pray, let me put my shawl about your feet, me'm, since we are

never to get there. You are quite in a paralysis with cold;—trembling and talking to yourself, exactly as if 'twas Christmas!"

"Thank you—yes—I daresay I shall be quite well to-morrow: after a good night's rest!" . . And away Rosamond's thoughts floated—away along the stream of fancy, fast and far out of the waiting-woman's reach.

"'Tis, after all, what I call dissolute work," resumed the Abigail—"two pensive and unprotected women—though I hope I am able to take care of any ten ladies and myself likewise—getting to a strange London hotel as late as this on a dripping evening, and not a soul to meet them.—Mr. Blosse was very urgent with me, me'm, to persuade you, before we left, to bring up a male attendant with you—as if such inconsistent ways as his was fit to be made a show of;—let alone protecting any body in these fine London streets of theirs one has heard so much about."

"This is beginning life again," said Rosamond, continuing to think aloud.

"Certainly, me'm; but it is an old beginning for a person of my age. A twelvemonth ago, if any one had displayed me triumphing through the streets of London,

I should have answered without stipulation, 'That's not the Anne Nelkson that I was brought up with.' But we see what we must see, and we go where we must go, and that's just it.—Here we are, it seems!"

And with these words the sentimental, novel-reading *confidante*, not past an attachment of her own, vanished as completely as a person in a drama disappears from the stage—and in her place appeared a vigilant bustling woman of thirty-five;—a woman sharp at settling with a post-boy, numerically accurate as to boxes, bags and baskets; and exigent (not to say abusive) in commanding the host of civil waiters who ran to and fro, around the interesting widow:—for Nelkson's first cries demanded brandy, tea—any thing warm which they had ready, that very instant; hot water, French mattresses, a person competent to carry a message, and to run across London *when her mistress wanted him*—the address of the nearest medical man there and then; and—a fire.

Yes, of course, a fire should be lighted in Mrs. Westwood's sitting-room directly; but the chimney might smoke for ten minutes at first, it was feared. Would the

lady mind stepping into another apartment for a quarter of an hour, till every thing in her own room was made comfortable ?

Rosamond mind !—she had stepped far enough thence amongst her air-castles and Spanish *chateaux*—innocent of the slightest cognizance of the frantic and contradictory orders, discharged in irregular volley, by her maid, with the view of substantiating "her lady's" fastidiousness and consequence. In a dream, our heroine followed where she was led ; sate down, threw off her bonnet—a little bewildered, and entirely engrossed: thankful to be relieved from the storm of tongues which had raged in the hall and on the staircase.

Truth to say, Rosamond was oppressed, more perhaps than she knew—far more than she would have owned—by the sense of her isolation.—She was in London; literally without possessing a solitary acquaintance, not to say friend ; and she was bodily very much tired. At that moment gladly would she have resigned all her money to any one on whose shoulder she could have laid her throbbing head, while she wept like a child! She had no fears for her future ; but her

present now was sufficiently desolate. Mr. Oliphant had fortified her with a letter to his correspondents in town—Messrs Grangeley and Bessell; but Rosamond did not stand in need of legal assistance. Mrs. James Rick, who had ferreted out the fact, that her brother's widow had left Halcyon Row without bearing off a companion thence, had pursued her with an epistle, all milk and honey, enclosing a sealed note of introduction to Mrs. Bartholomew Nagle of Blandford Square, "a person of great sweetness and spiritual refinement;" but the widow felt her sister-in-law's civility as merely a desperate and final expedient to keep some hold upon her. She had an idea what manner of woman such a Mrs. Nagle must be. How long she should stay in that hotel—whether she should walk or drive on the morrow—when she should make any *friends* (the inexperienced never care for nor calculate upon acquaintanceship, with its uses and exemptions)—what she was first to do—all these things rose up before the solitary lady with a confusing importunity, in the trouble of which there was weariness of body, as well as fear of mind. The lights in the street without

(for she had declined candles) recalled to her that November day, on which her escape from the thraldom of married life and its terrors, had opened themselves before her. She could already think of her uncouth, provincial, limited husband, as of the one who had really cared for her comfort, and for whose comfort she had cared not at all. There was the inexperience of a child—there were the passions of a woman—there was that unsatisfied craving which more or less besets every creature having the least spark whatsoever of the poet in his composition.—She was out of her old life—not *in* her new one. All was a mystery, an entanglement, utter chaos . . . . . .

The step close behind Rosamond's chair was welcome, because it startled her from her dream : and though the "Bless me ! what have we got here ?" which followed, was in the voice of a gentleman ; and, what was worse, in the bold, blithe voice of man who might merely be at considerable peace with himself,—but who might, also, have been recently "keeping out the chill" with wine, —to judge from its tones.

The speaker wore a fine silk handkerchief

of many colours round his throat. On his head was a hat streaming with rain, and in his hand was a candle, by aid of which two of the most jocund eyes that ever glistened in human forehead took a quick observation of the widow. Not only was Rosamond's bonnet thrown down on the floor beside her, but in her reverie, her cap had slipped from her head, and her rich chestnut brown hair was in some disorder. By way of background to the new-comer,—who began to lay by the hat and shawl aforesaid, also a saturated pea-coat, talking volubly all the time,—were two or three waiters, and a valet among them,—explaining and protesting that the lady had been merely shown into his room just for a moment, until the fire in her own ceased to smoke. They were very sorry—they had no idea he would be in town that night.

"I am truly glad you had not," was the gallant reply, "since it has procured my room the honour of such a visit.—A fire, I think I heard! Ma'am, you are more sensible than the generality of English people, who treat cold and hot just as if they were Good Friday and Christmas Day—things settled by act of parliament, and who can't conceive why

one may wish to shiver at midsummer. By your leave, madam, as I happen to be one of the chilly mortals, and am thoroughly wet with coming from Richmond in an open carriage, I will sit by your fire till I can establish one of my own. Light, order a fire for me here immediately! Here's your maid, madam, who can give a good account of yours, I perceive by her face.—Here's your mistress's bonnet, and here's her shawl—and here's my arm, madam: Pray do me the honour . . . Which way, waiter?"

"Well, to be sure," said Nelkson, mechanically taking up the wearables, and following Rosamond and her audacious escort, "if we have not got impudence and fluency here by the score, I am a deaf mute!—I should not like to have to make head against that gentleman—let alone a lonely, abstracted creature like my lady. And his man's another such, or Nelkson begins with an 'O.'"

The Abigail was like other Abigails, when surprised, half right. Fluency there was in no moderate dispensation; but impudence, hardly;—else must Rosamond, refined as she was, have instinctively recoiled from her self-introduced acquaintance, who escorted her

to her own parlour, sate down and warmed his hands, talking all the time, and making revelations of which our heroine did not hear —nor her *confidante* miss—a single word.

"Quite true, madam :—we seem entirely agreed on this point. When I am down at Shepherdston, in July, which is not often—I am Shepherd of Shepherdston, in Derbyshire, madam—I have fires made regularly every evening and in every room ;—but I always open the windows to promote the circulation of air. In our climate there is no dispensing with artificial heat. What a day for you, this, to make a journey upon!"

"Sir!" replied Rosamond, bewildered at such a flow of language. . . . "Nelkson!"

"I am here, me'm," was the faithful-to-death answer. "Did you call ?"

"For tea, I dare say?" took up the widow's wondrous new acquaintance. "After a drive on a bad day, I know nothing so refreshing as tea. Pray, let me ring; we men indulge on such occasions—but I don't smoke ('tis a nasty habit), and your smoker always wants his brandy and water after his cigar—so I prefer sherry ;—but to-night I shall take tea, too. Waiter, tea for two!"

"But, sir," . . . . . interposed Rosamond, opening her large beautiful eyes in unaffected astonishment.

"Why, if you wish to turn me away from your fire," pursued the buoyant Mr. Shepherd, "say so at once, and I am gone. Cold I may be, and damp I was just now ; but I never take a liberty with a lady. 'Twas my father's maxim before mine. 'Gervase,' my governor used to say to me, when I was no higher than his knee, 'make love to as many women as you please—but make love like a gentleman. Never be forward ; and, accordingly, forward I never *am*—A screen you wanted, ma'am ? Pray, let *me* ring—Waiter, a screen ! "

The waiter brought in a screen ; but he brought the tea-tray also, and with the tea-tray two cups. Matters were growing serious, and Rosamond was wakened up by the continuous eloquence of her guest to a point of consciousness, at which she felt that matters were growing disagreeable also, and that she had better cut them short. Alas ! she was not the least in the world of a coquette, and could not get beyond the matter of fact, and practical inquiry, "Will

you see if the fire in that—in Mr. Shepherd's room, has burnt up!"

"That's to say, ma'am, that you would prefer to take your tea alone—Natural, perfectly natural; after a long drive one is jarred and shaken—not disposed to talk. Pray, don't fancy that I want to wear you out, ma'am—I am sure that my fire is as well as I could wish it—once being transported from better company to my own,—and I am quite dry. Ma'am, I have the honour to wish you a good night's rest."

And, with a vivacious little bow, the strange man vanished.

"Well, I'm sure!" was the exclamation of Nelkson, when the door had closed upon the intruder.—Shepherd do they say his name is?—it should be Wolf, if I had the substantiation of affairs! That I *do* call cool! —with a face like a red apple, he has—and hair as short as if cattle had been browsing about it. Lord, me'm! if he should prove a lunatic,—with that short hair"—

"Give me some tea, and let me go to bed," was Rosamond's languid answer. The whole episode had interrupted her dream less than any save dreamers can believe. It was a

godsend, though, for the lady's-maid. "If I don't find out," thought she within herself, "who and what that person is before the morning dawns—my name is Patterson, which is not exactly the case."

Alas, for poor Nelkson—a mere country practitioner at best;—and who had to contend with such a town Scapin as the inquisitive and crafty Mr. Light!—She was addicted to good living in an honest way; accordingly, so soon as her lady was fairly disposed of for the night, she set forth on a voyage of discovery to find some "little matter," more solid than tea, for her own delectation and support. What was so natural as that, meeting a smooth-shorn, creditable middle-aged person on the staircase, who offered himself as her Palinurus through the Scyllas of a strange London hotel, she should, in return, expand in grateful confidence? To this the administration of "something comfortable" might conduce; but let us not speak a word of scandal against Nelkson the faithful. What she said—to use her own words—"a child might have participated in." "Her lady," she averred, "was, of all ladies, wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best; every one knew it,

just as surely as that her own name was not Peters, and as that she was *not* related to Lord Nelson. Her lady was a lady of singular delicacy and reserve—a lady very fond of reading Italian, and who wished for a master the very first minute—a lady just delivered from a brute of a husband, thirty years older than herself, who would never let them come to London—a lady of four thousand a-year—a lady who had no poor relations."—What harm was there in divulging this much to one whose remarks on the subject—as Nelkson herself expressed it—were "dictated by the purest propriety?" People that were too backward in coming forward, she had always considered, violated the principles of delicacy, as much as parties who were eternally pushing and pressing themselves upon every body.

This, it would seem, was the opinion of others besides Nelkson,—since at an early hour on the following morning, before Rosamond could have formed any plan for the day, the waiter announced—"A gentleman, who wished to wait upon Mrs. Westwood;" and in answer to the "Show him in," which our heroine, in sheer

bewilderment and innocence administered—Mr. Shepherd presented himself.

The clear light of day showed that person to be beyond dispute an agreeable-looking man of forty or thereabouts: very neat in his dress, which might be gayer in its colours than sentimental folks would esteem gentlemanly,—somewhat of the stoutest in frame, and more rubicund in complexion than is interesting. His hair, cut very short, curled close to his head without the intervention of Mr. Light. He was as scrupulously clean shaven as though beard he had none; his hands were full fleshed, not to say fat—upon one finger he wore a ruby of unmistakable value. His voice was penetrating rather than loud, and his pronunciation neater than is the rule with Englishmen. Bold he was, there was no gainsaying it; but still not vulgarly forward, albeit he helped himself to a chair, before he could be asked to sit down.

"I make no apology," he began, "for coming in person to say that I hope you are no worse, madam, for yesterday's journey, and last night's chill."

Rosamond bowed, and thanked Mr.

Shepherd,—then not much else was to be done, since, without positively interrupting her, he took advantage of her hesitation to interpose in continuation—

"I think, madam, if I am not mistaken—indeed, my people heard it from your people—that this is your first visit to London. Now, really, I should be very much flattered if I could be of any use to you in any way! —I am old enough, I trust, to be permitted to offer my services without awkwardness; and I have no earthly thing in any earthly world to do. Had not my sister, Mrs. Ayrescough, of Bridle Hill, just left town for the continent, I should have put myself at your disposal through her medium, as a more orderly mode of proceeding than the present. But, really, we lose a great deal of good time, and good enjoyment, I always think, in England, because of our ceremonious formalities;—and I make a point of disregarding them in my own person, as well as in that of other people, whenever it is in the least possible. If you agree with me, madam—as I trust may be the case—you will oblige me by telling me if there is any thing which I can do for you."

"You are very good to trouble yourself, sir; but" . . . .

"I do assure you, Mrs. Westwood, trouble, if you choose to call it so, is the very last thing which ever crosses my mind. Having little or no occupation, I am always sincerely glad when I can be of any assistance to others,—not precisely however, to *every* body.—People with good-nature to let, must make up their minds, I always say, to very promiscuous tenants, and at very low rents. But I never could understand why a gentleman might not be of service to a lady; although they did not happen to be . . . connected. About carriages, or shopping, or addresses—or any sight which it might give you any pleasure to see—(I presume, public places are at present out of the question;) pray, make use of me as if you had known me for years. I have ventured to send in one or two flowers—a lady's room never looks habitable without them. Here they come," and as he spoke, entered Light with a basket fresh from Henderson's,—filled with flowers rare enough—but not vulgarly costly.

What could Rosamond say, little used to

the ways of the world, as she was—and to advances so far from being according to rule ?—She acquitted herself badly, I fear ; since her answer was—" Really, sir, I hardly know how to acknowledge politeness so extraordinary . . . I" . . . .

" Extraordinary, my dear madam—not in the least !—everyday rather, let me style it—as if a few common flowers merited the name—He has not sent even the new snuff-coloured azalea !—Pray, don't mention it. Is there any thing further which I can have the honour and pleasure of doing for you this morning ? "

" Nothing—I am very much obliged to you," said the lady rising.

" Then, to interrupt you no longer, I will take my leave. But we are near neighbours, madam, I hope you will recollect ; and recollect, too, that what I say I mean, and that when I can be of any use to you, without disagreeable intrusiveness "—these last words were slightly emphasized—" I hope you will do me the favour to have recourse to me, and meanwhile, that you will allow me to lay a reminder of my existence on your table." And so saying, down went the brisk gentle-

man's card; and, with his quick little bow, he disappeared as promptly as he had entered.

"This is very strange and not very pleasant," murmured Rosamond to herself. "But what could I have done to put a stop to it? Shepherd of Shepherdston! If I am to see or hear much more of this officious neighbour of mine, I will not be long in changing my shelter."—And with this the visiter, and his unsolicited and officious civilities, passed from Rosamond's mind as things which had no existence, while she composed herself to consider what she was to do next.

Not so the brilliant widow from the vision of the "man about town." "'Tis very strange," said Mr. Shepherd to himself, when the door of Number Nine had closed upon him—"how matters turn out! There is a fate in all these things, no question. I do not remember ever to have been so much struck with a woman on so short an acquaintance."—(Alas! for the treacheries of a Shepherd's memory.)—"Light—you must be wide awake. Her maid is not close, you said."

"Not particularly, sir," was Mr. Light's dry answer, "after the second glass of *liqueur*."

"Good! Well, then, don't spare cherry brandy; find out every possible thing you can about them: where they go—whom they know—what brings them to London. But, mind—I must not have any liberties taken."

"Liberties, lord, sir! and she the other party.—I scorn taking liberties as much as yourself, sir, except when I am expressly invited, or when the other party happens to be very good-looking. This lady's lady seems a thoroughly respectable and countrified female."

"Listen to what I say—and fewer words. I have reasons for wishing to have the most exact information about this Mrs. Westwood—especially what family she belongs to. I hate a tribe of relations—rich or poor, it matters not. You may go, Light . . . and really," continued Mr. Shepherd, rubbing his hands like a schoolboy when he was alone, "should the result of our inquiries prove tolerably satisfactory, who knows but that at last I shall settle? At any rate, it is something to do, and to think about—and, Gad! by no means unpleasant."

And away to his tailor's bustled the sanguine bachelor.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ITALIAN MASTER.

For her first day, an early drive in the Park, and a quiet visit to the Abbey, were all that suggested themselves to the novice by way of occupations. Rosamond could postpone as long as she liked the consideration of situation and form of establishment. Whom had she to please save herself? With Nelkson for a duenna, shrouded in her very deep mourning, she could go to and fro as she wished, with small chance of exciting attention. The Abigail, howsoever disposed she might be to favour the widow, with a lady's-maid's version of Hervey's meditations among the tombs at Westminster, had learnt just as much as this, when to speak and when to be silent; and accordingly she kept her fine sentiments for tea-time and Mr. Light, or for her country

correspondent, as might be: only venturing to say, in answer to some monosyllable which dropped from Rosamond, "Why, sight-seeing gets very dull without reciprocation—as dull as the play, where there was only six in the pit and seven went to sleep. Suppose, then, you postponed St. Paul's, and Windsor, and the Tower, and the Mint, and the Freemason's Tavern, till you have a friend to partake them."

"A friend!" was the rather mournful echo.

"Shepherdston is in Shropshire, from what I can hear," said Nelkson, after a very long silence; "and there are waterworks in the garden, and a warbling shepherd in smalls, who plays his own pipe, which people come from twenty miles round to see."

But Rosamond was with the mighty dead—among the graves and epitaphs, and so the rill of communication trickled past her.—Nelkson, moreover, could not be certain whether her mistress had or had not recognized the smiling, bowing gentleman, mounted on a particularly neat horse, who passed them thrice in Whitehall. "London streets," said the prudent woman

to herself, "are free to all; and I'm not going to foster her romantic suggestions.—Heigho! I wonder what Mr. Blosse is about."

When Rosamond returned home, she found cards on her table,—cards from Mr. Bessell, Mrs. Bessell, and Miss Grace Bessell, and with their cards a note. "They are very prompt, I must say," was Rosamond's exclamation.—The note, however, proved to be not of Bessell origin, since thus it ran—

"Mr. Shepherd hopes that Mrs. Westwood will excuse a moment's intrusion. Having heard that his neighbour is in search of an Italian master, he begs to recommend Signor Capranico, No 17, Warwick-street, Golden-square, as a person who will do his duty by his pupils—and whose accent is unexceptionable. Signor Capranico has a large connection among some of our highest families," &c. &c.

The note was thrown on the chimneypiece with no small irritation of manner. "Nelkson,"—said Rosamond, quickly, "I thought you knew that I could and *would* keep nobody about me who talked over either myself or my affairs.—You must have forgotten this. It is of no consequence

just now; since I shall leave this hotel to-morrow. But, if any thing of the kind happens again, I shall be compelled to call in the services of a stranger. Such *espionage* is detestable: as bad as "———

"Leave this, ma'am!—and pray, where for? that I may prepare a little!—Then I suppose you will not wish me to inspect the books?"—The negative answer was of course given, and the maid retired, feeling that safety for her resided in flight and cunning escape from the seductions of Mr. Light and his Copenhagen bottle!—She succeeded, merely because she was permitted so to do; for Mr. Light and his master were a pair of consummate practitioners: and such are aware, that too great haste may, under circumstances, be as dangerous as too great slackness.

The next morning Rosamond woke with a slight cold, she thought; at all events, feeling just so much of the languor of indisposition as makes active exertion unpleasant. Her impatience to find a residence must be postponed: and on sensible grounds, too,—since, though not the wisest of women, she felt more intimately than she could

have conceived possible, her solitariness and inexperience in the ways of Babylon. She must ask a question or two of Mrs. Bessell; supposing that lady proved at all intelligent and accessible.—In the mean time, she might still do something. It was not necessary to have a house of one's own to read Italian in. Accordingly she drove to ——'s, there to learn what Italian master she had best engage.

The library was gloomy, for London *can* show dull days before midsummer;—and this day was a wet one to boot. Four or five tall dark-visaged men, in large coats, not relieved by any hem of white linen, were whispering in the distance, or sitting at the counter. Deep-toned voices were talking eagerly.—A few minutes elapsed before Rosamond could be attended to.

"I protest, me'm," whispered Nelkson, "that this is as like the Missis of Adolpho,—so queer and gloomy, and with all these foreign faces about one—as one spot can be to another, which is not a palace with a rainbow. I should like to know what they are talk—talking about, I must say!—Something dismal, I'm sure, or my name is Whitaker."

Nelkson was not far wrong; the harassed-looking foreigner with large features, who at last came forward to the counter, apologized for his delay and the confusion of the moment, on the score of "news from Italy."

"Can you recommend to me a good Italian master?" said our heroine—"not for a child: but for a grown-up person—for myself, I mean."

"Certainly," was the answer—"there were two or three just then in London of the very highest quality. The most popular one and the best liked was Signor Capranico."

"I do not intend to read with Signor Capranico," was Rosamond's abrupt and instinctive remark. "I should prefer some one newer from Italy."

"Signor Marliani, then, might perhaps suit the lady," replied the shopman.—"He is a very good master too, attends in the first families, and is a man of high birth and connections in his own country."

There was a murmur among the foreign party, as if some of its members were desirous of taking part in the discourse. One or two advanced a step and the name of "*questo povero* Montegrone," was audible.

"No!" replied the shopman in Italian, the meaning of which Rosamond perfectly understood. "The lady wishes to have a master who is well known, and not one without any experience. Signor Marliani will suit the lady far better."

"I should like to hear something about the other gentleman though," said the wilful Rosamond.

The shopman was a little sulky.—They did not know at ——'s much of Signor Montegrone. It was true he had not been long in England, but he was in very bad health—

"Yes—owing to his attendance upon the death-bed of his brother, whom they murdered!" burst out from one of the dark complexioned men in the background.

"Murdered!" echoed Rosamond.

"One of the Montegrones was in the revolution, I understand," said the shopman, "and was very badly wounded. He died a few weeks ago."

"And the gentleman who is left teaches Italian?"

"Yes—I believe so," was the indifferent answer.

"Teaches perfectly!" cried the third

speaker. "He is a good man, and a learned man, and a brave man. Pray, try him, lady; if you wish ever to be of use to the unfortunate!"

"I will take both addresses," said Rosamond with true woman's tact: and on these being given to her, with a slight bow she extricated herself from the group of Italians, who had pressed closer to admire her beauty, than so many northern gentlemen would have done—and was gone; followed by Nelkson.

A remark, as familiar as complimentary, was launched after the fair widow by the youngest of the Italians.

"For shame, Filippo!" cried the deep stern voice of the speaker who had addressed her; "wilt thou never be a man? Cannot misery and exile make thee grave?"

"*Ma, che diavolo?*" was the half petulant half light-hearted reply, "are we so rich, and so happy, that we can afford not to laugh, when the laugh costs us nothing?—And are the Englishwomen, in general, so very tender-hearted?"

And the two left the shop, throwing their huge cloaks up round their chins, though it was midsummer in England.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OTHER NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

The first step taken by Rosamond, in vindication of her free-will, was to write a note to Signor Montegrone, desiring him to come to her on the following morning.—The next was to return Mrs. Bessell's visit; since she felt that her lights regarding settlement of herself in a house of her own were but dim, and that the sooner that matter was accomplished the better it would be.

The first call paid on a stranger in London, by a stranger, *was* an event in the life of every one—at least before the days came when ladies run up from York or Exeter just to consult a dentist, or to plot, by the aid of Madame Dévy, in what manner forty years may be made to sit more gracefully than thirty-nine have done. Persons hardly past their prime, can even now recollect when

the only lady of a Lancashire village, who had paid a three months' visit in London—who had held a million in her hand at the Bank—who had seen Royalty in state at the Theatre, and the charity children in gala at St. Paul's,—took precedence of the untravelled, for some twenty years after, and decided upon dress, manners, and cooking. Nothing, however, could be less exciting than our heroine's first experience of making acquaintance in London. Except for its double drawing-room, Mrs. Bessell's house in Upper Bedford Place might have belonged to St. Anne Street, or Great George Square, in Liverpool, so utterly undistinguished were its dingy garnitures; while the lady of the mansion quietly dressed for a round of visits in the neighbourhood—giving thereby the lie to a favourite country tradition, that London gentlewomen never stir out on foot alone,—though more easily polite than one of her class in Liverpool would have been, was but a commonplace woman. Finding that Rosamond stood in need of counsel, Mrs. Bessell begged her to dine with them the next day:—"Quite alone, if you will excuse it," added she, "for we have an in-

valid; and, on her account, are just now seeing no company nor going out.—Probably you may like to consult Mr. Bessell—ladies have such poor heads for business."—The invitation was accepted.

"I shall never be intimate with *her*," thought Rosamond, as she drove from the door; "but I dare say she will know all that I want to know about chairs and tables. 'Tis a shame, however, to go and dine there merely to make use of her; Mrs. Rick could not be more worldly."—And then came a sigh, which said, "How strange it would be were one to become like the rest of them!—and if London should turn out dull, too!"

The rest of the day was got through by aid of another drive, less and more solitary —for Nelkson was Rosamond's companion— and in a languid study of books, on which the reader's eye dwelt, while her mind wrought busily upon topics with which the book had nothing to do. I am afraid you will be impatient with my heroine, because *she* was impatient.—What was all this to come to? What was it to end in?—And then, as Rosamond has often since confessed, resentful thoughts arose in her mind against

"those Bells!"—precisely as if our refusal to commit our daughter Martha to her guardianship had been the cause of this *ennui*. But Rosamond, when left to her better self, was just and noble. "Ah, no!" was her second idea, "how right they were! Am *I* fit to be intrusted with any other creature's destiny; when, even now, with my perfect liberty and ample means, I do not know in which way to arrange my own? How unjust I was to them on Tuesday week!—How rude! —But . . . . . and I will speak to Mr. Bessell about it to-morrow."—And out came the tablets; and the widow, in a state of excited orderliness, made her memorandum with a precision which would have done credit to a solicitor's clerk, sighing aloud, when she had written it—"Yes, any thing, *any* thing better than a companion—a spy—of Mrs. Rick's choosing."

"So I should say, madam," was Nelkson's comment; "if you could know what a double-faced woman that Miss Dillington is, whom Mrs. James is always trying to get off her hands—though the two are as sweet as a psalm to each other when any body catches 'em together. Miss Dillington was Mr.

Rick's intended, and Mrs. James enticed him to jilt her:—and somehow, can't shake her off since they made it up, it seems; but if she could put arsenic into one of her tracts, or transport the other party away to Canada, where nobody could speak to her more, that's what Mrs. Rick would do, ma'am, by Miss Dillington—or Nelkson is not my name, but Peacock."

The next day was one of greater animation and variety.—There were letters on Rosamond's table when she came in to breakfast. We had written to her; for my wife judged that she might be feeling lonely in "that wilderness of London." But better than this was a note, in a hand perfectly strange to her, which ran thus:—

"Having accidentally heard that the Signora Westwood is thinking of placing herself under the care of *Il Cavaliere* Montegrone, a FRIEND TO ORDER is anxious to warn that lady, before she commits herself to an acquaintance which she may find more than usually troublesome—that Signor Montegrone is connected closely with the most extravagant revolutionary and republican

associates in France and Italy: persons who are utterly unscrupulous as to means, provided they can enlist the rich or the generous in their hopeless cause. The Signora Westwood is too amiable to be compromised (and compromised she will be) by any dealings with such persons;—and is hereby kindly and gravely apprised of their tendency and projects."

"INCOGNITO."

There was no date to the above communication, which was sealed with a wafer: and the penny postmark did not suffice to reveal in what part of Babylon it had been committed to the Lion's mouth.

"Really!" exclaimed Rosamond, tearing up the paper with an attempt at indifference—"it would seem as if every thing I did was watched. This poor man has some malicious and bitter enemy—Can it" . . . . and then she snatched up the fragments of the note, to compare them with one which was still lying on the mantelpiece—and then laughed aloud at the irritability of her own suspicions. Nothing could be more different than the writing—from Mr. Shepherd's.

Ere noon a card was brought in, and after it came the object of this denunciation, "Italo Montegrone."

Out of such a being who could fabricate a romance? He was a little man, long past middle age,—sallow, stooping, sad-looking, with coarse black hair cut as short as if he had just come out of prison, large ears, large dull dark eyes—a being depressed with fallen fortunes, and the awkwardness of a gentleman compelled to undertake an unfamiliar occupation. Never was there seen a fairer specimen of a language-master in spite of himself.—No grammar nor verbs were to be expected from that source, it was clear: no relishing reading of some great poem with one who could help her to enjoy it. Signor Montegrone seemed more unwilling than anxious to undertake the task—his pupil, it would seem, might teach herself for any suggestions he could offer. His unreadiness, however, roused Rosamond, who explained to him that she had already made some progress—

"Yes."

That she was anxious to receive her lessons altogether in Italian.

"Yes."

That she wished to read some of the new Italian literature. What book would Signor Montegrone recommend her to begin with?

"Yes," was still the answer.

Then, with the effort of one who is awaking himself, he said, he would bring some new book with him when he came to give his lesson. What hour would suit Mrs. Westwood?

"Early," was her reply, "as early as ten o'clock on any day of the week you please—and the terms?"

A dusty flush, not red exactly, mounted up to the roots of the melancholy man's hair—"He believed—he was not sure—he was not much in the habit. . . Would half a guinea be more than Mrs. Westwood wished to give?"

"No, certainly—On the contrary, if" . . .

"Then I will come on Friday morning at ten precisely, if that will suit madame. I have just agreed to read a little with an English gentleman who is also here—a Monsieur Seppard, or Shoepar—and am glad to bring the two engagements together."

Rosamond started to her feet. There

could be no possible mistake respecting this attack on her tranquillity. Mr. Shepherd again!—What could the man mean by thrusting himself before her, in season and out of season? For this had she declined the services of Signor Capranico? But what had she to do with Signor Montegrone's other pupils? After all, she must not be a fool. The whole thing might be an accident. She must have become *missish* with living so long in the atmosphere of gossip and espial which belongs to a country town! So soon as she got into a house of her own she should hear nothing more about it all.

Thus reasoning, Rosamond dismissed Mr. Shepherd from her mind, and gave herself up to the business of the day—her dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Bessell. In after years she laughed at the importance of this very insipid transaction to herself;—not that she cared whether the family would please her, or whether she should please them; but because her mind was in that restless, unsettled, apprehensive state, to which no event comes simply, nor without a sort of morbid exaggeration and speculation, such as the orderly and well-trained cannot con-

ceive. "I verily think," said the widow to herself impatiently, as she stood before the glass, "that were it not for my mourning, I should be as hard to please to-day as any coquette of eighteen before her first ball—And what for? A London lawyer, his wife and daughters—people whom I shall probably never see ten times again!"

"Why, me'm," was Nelkson's judicious remark, "dressing for London is not dressing for Liverpool. They know what style is here. And what is the best of it there? just what you can buy for money, me'm, and no more. Though I am not as young as I could wish to be, I can tell the difference. It pervades from top to bottom—why, me'm, the gentlemen's servants here are more polite and speak better than gentlemen's selves yonder! There's a Mr. Light in this very house, for instance—a married man, me'm, I have reason to imagine, and his conversation—could you hear it—is as elegant as an instructive book. But *you* need not be afraid, go where you will. You never looked like a Liverpool lady—and this was what always put out Mrs. Chidley so: with her sables and her grebe-skins. Spend what she would,

me'm, there was Cotton written upon her visage, as plain as the words could speak,—or my sister married a Jenkinson."

In spite of Nelkson's inspiriting encouragement, Rosamond could not prevent herself from feeling solitary and nervous as she entered the Bessells' drawing-room, dingy in the dubious light which marks the closing of a summer day in Bloomsbury,—trembled a little as the lady of the house shook hands with her, and trembled a little more as a rather ample and magnificent person rose from the sofa, and was introduced as "Miss Grace Bessell, my second daughter."

In this lady's case, it must be owned that some cause might exist for nervousness on the part of a provincial widow, were she even as beautiful as Rosamond. Miss Grace Bessell was a somewhat overcoming personage. Her figure was superb;—and her very white neck and her very white arms were thoroughly worthy of the very liberal display made of the same. Her face was handsome but incurably mature. No art could have given to those large features the semblance of youth, and it may have been some self-knowledge on the point, which had stamped

them with an expression of sublime and doleful consciousness of ill-usage, which suited ill with the innocent muslin frock, and the one dewy full-blown rose which Miss Grace wore in her bosom. Her voice was honeyed but lacrymose; and though she bowed, and bent, and drooped her eyes with elaborate and courteous gentleness, Slander's self could not have described her as "humble." The greatness of Miss Grace, however, was not of taciturn quality. She had much to say—beginning with the supposition that this was "Mrs. Westwood's first visit to London."

Rosamond owned to being a novice: but was in a fair way of losing the character;—her intention being to remain in town.

"Ah!" was the languid response of Miss Grace. "Of course you will prefer the new *quartier* to ours, having no ties such as keep us here. I can never see the summer come round, without feeling how immense is the sacrifice we ladies make to Law! . . . . immense," repeated she, turning up her large eyes, "and ill-rewarded!"

"You prefer the country, then?" asked Rosamond, a little astonished; for never had

maid or matron less the air of rural simplicity than Miss Grace Bessell.

"Such a distance from the Park!" was her indirect reply. "I can't imagine any thing more funereal, than riding through all these burning streets home to papa's early dinner. Lady Marcia says that it would hinder *her* from ever mounting a horse again. Do Liverpool ladies ride much, Mrs. Westwood?"

"Not much," answered Rosamond. "Neither the country nor the climate are tempting: and the Liverpool gentlemen are too busy in the day-time to be often at any body's command."

"What a giving up!" said the plaintive Amazon. "A privation I should not know how to meet. You will ride, of course, *here*, Mrs. Westwood?"

"I am not sure," was Rosamond's answer. "I almost fancy that I am too old to begin: and I shall find so many things besides to interest me, and to take up my time."

"O dear, how fortunate you are!—Music, I suppose, for one. . . . . You have no opera in Liverpool, have you? Lady Marcia and I agreed, mamma, on Tuesday, that we had had enough; and that neither of us

ever wished to listen to a note of music again .... But here's papa and dinner." And Miss Grace brightened as she rose;—on which poor, innocent Rosamond credited her with filial piety.

Her own introduction to Mr. Bessell took place upon the stairs. But the voice made her start. This was not the first time that Mr. Bessell had taken her down to dinner. The other time had been in her own house. But *that* Mr. Bessell had seemed heavy, pre-occupied, lethargic, and, she had fancied, slovenly in his dress; whereas *this* was a handsome, elderly man, strikingly resembling his daughter, and—our heroine fancied, even from his few words of recognition—somewhat higher in tone and intellect than the ladies of his family.

There exist few persons now—save here and there some reader of the Le Grand class—who would care to read a list of the dishes on the table, even had Soyer ordained the courses. Accordingly the absence of Mrs. Bessell's bill of fare—though Mr. Bessell liked a good bill of fare—will be excused. Rosamond in truth would not have noticed of what it consisted, for better or for worse,

had it not been for the active commentary of Miss Grace, who could speak to the point, and speak, too, with authority. Grand names, however, seemed to stand as high in her esteem as good cookery. The serving of the soup almost made her tearful. "The poor Marchioness of Dundee used to order that very *potage* every day that she dined at Véry's."

Rosamond had heard of the untimely death of this then-famed leader of fashion; and after such an utterance of fond remembrance, it was only natural to ask of Miss Grace if she had known the lady well.—But the question was far too direct and provincial; the answer to it was interrupted by a demand for *sauterne*, and afterwards forgotten to be given.—Ere Rosamond could think of the matter a second time, the great anxiety expressed by Miss Grace about Lord Everard Talbois' match with Miss Lackerby the heiress, had turned another page of the peerage, and placed the speaker on grounds where the Liverpool widow could not follow her.

"Is any thing more certainly known about it, papa? (Baker, those cucumbers and the Chili vinegar.) When one thinks of the Lackerby nose intruding itself into the gal-

lery at Crowle, it does seem a *mésalliance* indeed!"

"Come, Miss Grace Bessell, no finery. Lord Everard may put up with the Lackerby nose for the sake of the Lackerby five hundred thousand pounds. And I have always thought her a well-mannered, cultivated young lady, far superior to the common run of London girls. If either party is to be pitied, it is not Lord Everard."

"I am sure he will treat her like a gentleman (the *legumes*, Baker), and at all events she will never clash with his family. Lady Marcia says that the dear Duchess has absolutely gone into waiting again on purpose to keep out of the way of her daughter-in-law.—At her age!"

"A hopeful beginning, is it not, Mrs. Westwood? To marry into a family where one's very entrance is thought to be a shame and disgrace! A far happier woman would Miss Lackerby have been, if she could have caught my good friend, Shepherd."

"O papa! with that plebeian *abord!*"

"Only Shepherd," continued Mrs. Bessell, "is what Lord Everard can no longer afford to be, a man of spirit—and would not sell

himself to any one for money! I never saw more encouragement held out to living being than by Mrs. Lackerby to him."

"Now, *dear* papa," cried Miss Grace, pluming herself and waving upon her chair, "you say so to justify me, I am sure...Thank you! The lady whom Mr. Shepherd would not take—you cannot conceive a more undistinguished person than Mr. Shepherd, Mrs. Westwood—cannot, surely, be thought a prize for Lord Everard! I don't wonder that the dear Duchess feels compelled to draw the line; and I am sure, papa, that you of all living people are the last to depreciate our aristocracy; (the *Mayonnaise* to my mother, Baker—though you won't like it to-day, ma'am—It's a failure)...What a misery it is, Mrs. Westwood, that with an English *artiste* there is never any getting the same thing done twice in the same way! Lady Marcia says, that they have had twenty in one twelvemonth at Marbleton to please the Duke, who will not hear of a foreigner in his establishment—and not one turned out supportable after the first ten days."

"Well—about foreigners, I am of the Duke's mind," said Mr. Bessell. "But you

should tell Mrs. Westwood, Grace, that Lady Marcia professes to be a woman of taste. Talk of the *gourmandise* of a regular diner-out—it's nothing to be compared to the thorough-going epicurism of a fine lady: for that no cook, celestial or terrestrial, can satisfy. Shepherd declares that she had the cook rung out of his bed at three o'clock in the morning, at the Plough at Cheltenham, because she could not sleep; and took a fancy, there and then, for an omelette with *Maraschino* jelly."

"I don't doubt," replied Miss Grace, "that Mr. Shepherd is *difficile* enough himself among his own set. I could fancy him raising a whole town for any thing he wanted. But you merely take him under your protection to-day, papa, out of contradiction, and because Lord Alan's *Pasta* won the Derby against his *Parvenu*. Gentlemen are so fond of opposition, Mrs. Westwood. (Baker, the cream to Mrs. Westwood.) *Crême à la Cimitelli*—or cemetery cream, as our cook will persist in calling it."

"And perfectly right she is," replied Mr. Bessell—knowing her master's staunch old English principles. "Mrs. Westwood—come,

upon which side are you ?—for or against foreigners ?"

"Must I take a side ?" said Rosamond, smiling. "Or will you think I have already done so, if I confess to having this morning engaged a gentleman to read Italian with me ?"

"Signor Capranico," I suppose, suggested Miss Grace; "at Marbleton, they would not hear of any one but Capranico. They treat him there quite as one of the family. They make a solitary exception in his case."

"No—Signor Montegrone," was Rosamond's answer. "I believe he has not long arrived in England."

"Ah ! one of the refugees, I dare say. Only fancy, mama, some of those women coming to Lady Marcia, and wanting *her* to patronize their Refugee Ball—*her* of all people !—Is he a handsome man, Mrs. Westwood ?"

"On the contrary, the most depressed-looking being I ever saw. The sound of his voice alone is enough to make one sorry for him."

"Those refugees are always plausible," was Mr. Bessell's remark; "and it is amazing

what success they have with Englishwomen. Take care, Mrs. Westwood, that this depressed Signor Montegrone does not fascinate you. You know that I am, in some sort, your guardian; and an old married man, I hope, may always give advice, I hope, to a young unmarried woman."

There was a certain sincere good-nature in her host's tone, which touched Rosamond, though the harsh prejudice (such she felt it) revolted her.

"I have seen a good many of these refugees, Mrs. Westwood," continued Mr. Bessell; "and, take my word for it, it won't do. If they are really in earnest, why cannot they stay in their own country, and, if need be, *die* there?"

Rosamond felt that this sounded true and direct: and yet that it was any thing but the whole truth—and she longed to answer the "*Why.*" "Ah! you need not tell me which side you have taken," continued her host. "I see by your face that you are romantic, and think me an old bigoted John Bull. But I don't like that sort of people, Mrs. Westwood; and when you have known as much of them as I have done, you won't

find me so far wrong—take my word for it. It begins badly—it continues badly—it ends badly. No! the Italians make famous opera-singers;—but very rubbishy patriots, *I* think."

Mr. Bessell's, "*I think*" was consequential beyond the average. Yet Rosamond had courage enough, in the very face of it, to urge misgovernment, despotism, and such manner of pleas—not very logically it may be—but in hard, blushing earnest.

"Nonsense, my dear!" replied Mr. Bessell, who, about this stage of dinner, was apt to become generally positive, and particularly affectionate to the lady who sate beside him. "They are quite as well governed as they deserve ever to be—those Italians. Did they agree among themselves when they governed themselves? Do they agree even now when they are what they call in misfortune? You ladies like them, because they have winning ways with them; but one Englishman is worth ten of them, any day. Pass the wine, Grace;—and pray don't get refugee-bitten, my dear lady. We shall hear of you turning Catholic next, like Miss Battersby, an old playfellow of my

daughter's there, who married her singing-master.

"And she was with Lady Marcia, papa, the other day, begging—positively begging."

"You show me a dismal example," said Rosamond, "which I trust I am not going to follow. On the contrary, I am hoping for your advice about taking a house in town, and buying a living (is that not the right phrase?) in the country. I hope that is sober, and," with a slight irony of tone, "English and Protestant enough to please you."

"I am rejoiced to hear it, Mrs. Westwood: for really so strange are the things which Englishwomen are found capable of doing nowadays, that I am glad to meet with any body, like you, able to please yourself, who will set a good example. What with ladies who will go every where, and see every sight, however great the difficulty or danger may be —(Grace, you need not bristle up in defence of your friend, Lady Marcia)—and ladies who think they should sit in parliament—and ladies, Lord bless us! who write freethinking books—I am afraid that your sex at present is not in the most easy plight,

or the best repute possible. No more wine? nor you, Mrs. Bessell? nor you, Grace? Then I will follow you in five minutes, and we will soon settle about the house and the living. With money and common-sense a man can do any thing—how much more (as you are just disappearing, I may say it) a young and pretty woman, backed by an unexceptionable legal authority!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE REFUGEES.

A HOUSE was soon found for Rosamond—thanks to Mr. Bessell's counsels and introductions—a furnished house, looking upon Hyde Park : small it is true, but as cheerful a bower as ever maid, wife, or widow nestled in.—Nor was it found difficult to people the same with such discreet folk as are fit to wait upon a lonely lady.

Perhaps every thing came too readily for one like Rosamond, who had never been actively enough employed—perhaps there must be a canker in every bud, a curse in every granted prayer; but, once settled in her solitude, Rosamond began to think that to have some friend to read Zimmerman on the subject with, would be not unpleasant. She missed the noises of the hotel—she missed the daily provocation, which the

expectation that she was about to be provoked anew by Mr. Shepherd, had ministered to her.—Not that that gentleman was by any means disposed to lose sight of the lady; but, after having left his card in Park-street, with a line upon it in recommendation of "a treasure of a head-servant, who had lived for many years with his sister Mrs. Ayrescough," it was not very easy for him to make any immediate further advances;—Rosamond not being "one of those ladies in weeds," as my wife once put it, "who goes east and west to ask advice with tears in her eyes of all manner of single men."

Our widow had her pursuits, it is true; but pursuits are apt to become but so many feverish mockeries to people who merely resort to them in order to kill time. If she read Italian voraciously, till even poor melancholy Signor Montegrone was warmed up into a compliment on her enthusiasm—who was the better for it? If she sat one hour, or if she sat ten at the harp, who was there to call her to account save Nelkson?—or else Miss Grace Bessell, with her languid chronicle of Lady Marcia's predilections, and the number of hours, minutes, or seconds appointed by

Lady Marcia to her studies, useful or ornamental? Rightly minded people who would regulate love by pattern, and measure off sorrow by lengths, might have thought that such melancholy and lassitude were as inevitable to widowhood, as Rosamond's deep crape and dull bombazeen. So at least said Miss Grace; but Rosamond was too honest to fall into the world's rumour, nay, perhaps, she rather defied it; in no vulgar Amazonian manner, but with that strong secret protest which says, "What do you ask me to do or to be?"—and "What will you give me for so doing, and for so being—in return?"

It fell out, how, hardly any one appeared to know, that, in spite of the large number of her aristocratic acquaintances discoursed of by Miss Grace Bessell, that tall lady had much leisure and condescension to spare for our widow, just then.—Rosamond looked worth forming: four thousand a-year was a pretty sum to spend, and Mr. Bessell had mentioned in his family the singularly lonely position of its possessor.—Miss Grace presently owned to a *penchant* for Park-street only less strong than her admiration for Lady Marcia.

Upper Bedford-place was dull, owing to the nervous illness of Miss Bessell;—some unexplained complaint which demanded a twilight room and a quiet house. To tend her darling invalid, it was intimated that Miss Grace had turned a deaf ear to every species of matrimonial proposal,—though there was a second cousin of Lady Marcia's who fretted under this resolution,—aware the while that to protest against it would be vain. "Nay," would the lady add, "should we hear of the Honourable Mr. Tottington's sudden marriage, I for one shall breathe more freely" . . . . . and then she would stop herself, and sigh, and beg pardon.

The ladies will not forgive me for saying that, in part, Miss Grace gained such footing as she did gain in Rosamond's house, by her sprightly abuse of Mr. Shepherd, vented during a certain morning call. To this Rosamond gave ear with an appetite which puzzled herself. To credit Miss Grace,—the creature was a professional persecutor,—a man who lived in hotels, on purpose to molest lonely ladies that had rooms on the same floor with his distasteful attentions.—He it was who had showed such impertinent alacrity

in insisting that there must be something burning in Lady Angela Tewe's sitting-room at Cheltenham, which ended in Lady Angela being compelled to admit him into her visiting list.—When Mrs. Corkran Corkran's *vis-a-vis* ran away with her, Mr. Shepherd was the person who gave the five-pound note to Colonel Teddie's *valet* for stopping the horses, so much had he been pleased with the man's gallantry; and there Mr. Shepherd was now at Colonel Teddie's, a public fixture; just like any other old acquaintance, laughing so loud and leading the conversation. —He had always bottles in his pocket on board ship to offer to people that were sea-sick—and at that time, you know, dear Mrs. Westwood," sighed Miss Grace, "no living lady can be upon her guard against advances. Well, and now, I see him every morning I come here, with his groom behind him, riding up from Piccadilly at the very time when you are going to drive out. If any accident were to happen to either of us, he would appear at once in his true colours." Nor was this all; one day when Mr. Shepherd was off his horse, close to Mrs. Westwood's door—what did Mr. Shepherd mean by get-

ting off his horse just there?—he had absolutely had the forwardness to stop Rosamond's visiter, to shake hands with her, and "to force into her hands," so Miss Grace averred, the magnificent bouquet which she brought in with her.

"I thought you hardly knew Mr. Shepherd?" said dear, simple Rosamond.

"O, not I!" was the answer; "but papa does; and he has dined at our house more than once. I know Mr. Shepherd? No: he is one of the persons before whom one never opens one's lips, since he gets every where; and it's so disagreeable having every trifle that passes repeated.—But Colonel Champneys shall tell me what brings him into this neighbourhood so incessantly. I am quite willing to admit that this bouquet was aimed at you, and not meant for a dowerless virgin like me. It is like him: it is like him, too, to stay in town; where his presence, as he must know, is felt as more frequent than welcome! It is high time he was down at Shepherdston. Where do *you* go this summer, dear Mrs. Westwood?"

"Nowhere from home, I think, so long as I am in my deep mourning; perhaps I shall

winter in Paris : meanwhile I am interested in my Italian lessons, and, as Mr. Bessell knows, there is a piece of business for me to be complete which I will not leave unfinished."

"Ah, business!" was Miss Grace's reply, with a superfine sigh; "what a tax on a lady! I oftentimes tell my dear sister that she ought to be thankful to be released from it. Though indeed . . . As for me, I confess my utter incapability. . . and I do not know that I should be much less dense as regards Italian studies, if I were condemned to pursue them with such a master as your Signor Montegrone.—I never saw so dull an object."

"Poor man!" said Rosamond, "he must be ill, I think, from that strange, unnatural, fixed look which his eyes have. And sometimes he is so languid that I wonder how he has dragged himself up-stairs to give me his hour. It will not surprise me at any moment, to hear that he is entirely disabled from coming to me."

Rosamond's foresight was justified. The next day Signor Montegrone missed his lesson, without sending message or apology; and Rosamond's busy mind and beneficent

heart began to consider how it would be possible for her to inquire into the cause of his absence. But it would be first necessary for her to get his address; and that could not be done till the morrow.—The excessive distaste and want of interest shown by her master,—the blankness and the saplessness which bespoke a crushed spirit, had made a painful impression upon our widow.—She pondered the state of the lonely and exiled gentleman as she sate alone over her exquisite little dinner, with some idea that this was one of those stories in which to be good Fairy might be very charming. She began gravely to consider how best she might approach the sorrow or the destitution (if such existed) of one so apathetic and uncommunicative.—And as she stood on her balcony, overlooking the Park, for a last breath of the evening air, and a last glow of the evening sunshine, few who drove past could have imagined the cause of the deep and thoughtful sadness which shaded her features. Even Nelkson,—who came to bring her her veil, with an oozing of spite aimed at Miss Grace; which *spit* forth, that it was quite a relief to be left to themselves for one evening—and tilted

against Russell Square airs, that could not endure their own sphere—both lost upon the pensive Rosamond—wondered within herself whether her mistress was absolutely thinking of the defunct Liverpool merchant.

"A charming evening!" said a voice close to Rosamond; "and what a charming situation we have to enjoy it in—have we not, Mrs. Westwood?"

The dreamer startled, blushed, turned . . Close to herself, on the balcony of the next house—a house which had been long to let—red as a rose, small as a bird, and straight as an arrow, with his hat off, like one having a lodgment hard by, stood Mr. Shepherd . .

"I startled you, ma'am, I fear, by interrupting your thoughts so hastily," continued he; . . "I yield to impulse too much, I often think. Here we are, you see, good neighbours again. I've been trying to get hold of this particular house for a couple of years past; but Lord Watford and Mrs. Poulett Blackett's executors could not agree, and so there was no getting a title till a month ago. I *have* got one at last, however; and, strange to say, am delighted with my purchase. But your's is the prettier house."

Rosamond did not know what she said, feeling aghast at the revelation;—yet, in spite of herself, a little diverted. She uttered merely some phrase of civil assent.

"Very true, Mrs. Westwood: I *shall* have to pull the place to pieces before all is done. I imagine the old lady was a character. She kept rabbits in her drawing-room, and a seal in the butler's pantry, my man assures me: not that I swallow the seal.—But she was half crazy and a miser: and so my architect has been here all day to see what we could do.—I must have air, and I must have light, and I must have space, and I must have some privacy, and room to hang my pictures—and a corner to put a friend or two in.—Is it not curious that, in a great place like London, we should find ourselves living next door to each other, and what is more curious, some mutual acquaintances, after having ourselves made acquaintance so very oddly! I believe you know my excellent legal adviser, Mr. Bessell of Upper Bedford Place?"

A simple "Yes" sufficed. Mr. Shepherd was off again.—"An excellent fellow is Bessell—and a thorough gentleman, which is more than can be said of every one in his

profession. He gives capital wine. Miss Bessell, too, is a very superior person. Her retirement is a real loss to society: so good she was without the slightest pretence. I think we shall have some little to reverse the phrase—(Light, has the man got that measurement yet, there—of that space between the columns?)—to suit Miss Grace.—But she is a disappointed beauty, and that accounts for a vast number of small foibles. One must not be too hard upon Miss Grace. Ten years ago, she would have made a very good wife for any man, as times go."

"Good-evening, sir," said Rosamond, moving away from Mr. Shepherd's truths, which she felt to be more entertaining than discreet.

"Pray, one moment:—we have another acquaintance in common, about whom I wish to speak to you, if you have no objection—poor Montegrone."

There was no refusing to stop and listen. "I have been reading with him a little, Mrs. Westwood;—thinking it possible that I may make an Italian tour this autumn, and hearing that they were in very great want. He's not much of a master, it must be con-

fessed ; but I am sure you will agree with me in thinking, that, good or bad, he must not be turned out to die in the street!"

"You are speaking in jest, I hope," said Rosamond, who had, somehow or other, received the fixed idea that Mr. Shepherd could not speak in earnest.

"I am sorry," replied her neighbour reddening, and with some spirit, "that you should think I should take such liberties with you, and especially in regard to people in trouble. 'Gervase,' my good father used to say to me, 'laugh—and laugh heartily when you do laugh: but be a gentleman.' A gentleman is always considerate ;—and if I had to teach English in Milan, and had only two pupils,—and if I could not attend to them, because I was desperately ill; and if I had to provide for a sick wife—which, thank God! I have not—I should think it no jesting matter. And Signor Montegrone is quite as good a man in his own country as I—only thank common-sense, and our capital English constitution, I am no republican."

"But you surprise me, sir ! I had no idea that Signor Montegrone was married."

"He is, however, Mrs. Westwood ;—mar-

ried, and to a poor, low-spirited, helpless creature, who would not know how to keep the money together, even if he got any; and who sits all the day crying in their dismal little back parlour in Gerrard Street, Soho, and fancying that every body in the house wants to rob them.—And there he is now,—forced to give up: and not likely to be better.—I am sure, ma'am, you will join with me in some attempt to help them; and indeed I should have called upon you to-morrow with that object, had I not been fortunate enough to meet you by chance to-night.—What is the man about there, Light? Did not you tell him I would not have those folding-doors so far out into the room?"

"I am sure I feel much indebted to you, Mr. Shepherd," said Rosamond, with a sincere warmth which she would not for the world have had Miss Grace witness. "I shall be only too glad to be of any use in such a case. I will go myself and see Madame Montegrone to-morrow. What street did you mention?"

"You shall have the address as soon as ever I get back to my hotel. I would offer to meet you there—for it's a wretched place,

one hardly fit for a lady to enter—only it would look premeditated; and, naturally enough, they are very sensitive. Medical aid he has, I know, and of the best kind; but nothing can be done for him. They say that there is poison in the system which can never be worked out of it."

"Poison?"

"Lord! my dear madam, may I take the liberty of saying how superior to the rest of your sex you must be in the absence of curiosity?—Can you never have heard that Signor Montegrone, and his wife too, firmly believe that he was poisoned in Italy by those Jesuits?"

"No, I never heard of such a thing. Indeed, Signor Montegrone seemed always to have an objection to speaking; and never once alluded to his own private history."

"That was my very reason for beginning with him as a master, ma'am—the strong objection which *I* have to talking people. Excellent as Signor Capranico is—the master, Mrs. Westwood, whom I had the honour of recommending to you—he is too much of a lady's man to suit a downright practical person like me; and on my pressing for a

silent, unobtrusive teacher, who would do his work, and confine himself to it—at ———'s they gave me Montegrone."

Good Mr. Shepherd, it will be owned, had a happy knack of reconciling past and present, as my wife once happily described the white lies of Miss Adeliza Le Grand.

"But," continued he, "I soon perceived that the poor fellow had something upon his mind. You know, Mrs. Westwood, I doubt not, as well as I, that there is a party here against him, who have been writing anonymous letters to deter people from employing him. What trash these Italian liberals are, to be sure!—always quarrelling; and so I set myself to find out what was the matter, and by degrees came to know all about the Montegrones."

"And you heard?"

"It is rather too long a tale for a balcony —Light!—(I say, Light, make that man perfectly understand that that fireplace in the corner is going to be taken away utterly.) If you will allow me, I will wait upon you some morning, and tell you the result of my discoveries—There's Lady Marcia Fawkes riding home. Who could fancy that she

had ever considered herself a beauty? Yet she did, and wondered that other people didn't. Good-evening, Lady Marcia" (kissing his hand gallantly); "and good-evening, Mrs. Westwood. Pray permit us to be good neighbours!"

And the wily man—enchanted at his own adroit management—disappeared into the house. Doors were banged to, and shutters were shut; and Rosamond was left standing alone on her balcony, at once teased, interested, and reminded of Miss Grace Bessell's anecdotes. To strive against Mr. Shepherd's advances was obviously lost labour.—She must hear the tale which was too long for the balcony—how else could she help the refugees, wisely—efficiently—and delicately? for her dream ran on Jesuits, and poison, and old Italian palaces.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A FRIEND IN NEED.

NEVER was habitation less like Italian palace, old or new, than the wretched two rooms in Gerrard Street, Soho, in which a highly-born and honourable gentleman (Signor Montegrone was both) had been thankful to find a harbourage on his arrival in England—to commence his struggle for life at an age when other men are thinking of retreat. The sights how different !—if I do not add sounds and scents, it is because I am told that the speaking voices of the Lombards are not the sweetest in the world—neither their portals and staircases of their houses the most fragrant. But, though both the language-master and his wife were themselves dingy and unkempt enough, and careless of a hundred little graces and proprieties, their taste for which the well-

bred English never lose, however low they sink in fortune—the dinginess of the atmosphere, and the grime of carpet, chairs, curtains, window-panes—of every thing they touched, tasted, and looked upon—was felt as an additional weight, and trial, and discouragement by even their sad and preoccupied hearts.—Brought up among things of beauty, the filthy furnishing of a fourth-rate London lodging-house, in a bad situation, degraded them so far they saw it to a point of depression to which we northerns rarely fall. The scorching fire in the grate—the rusty bars whereof were clogged with cinders and ashes, though the day was hot—of itself spoke with a painful significance to our widow. I have said that she was something of a day-dreamer, and to such, contrasts are oftentimes as suggestive as harmonies.—She stopped short within the door of the room: painfully impressed for a moment, forgetting her mission, and the courtesies which she was nervously anxious to offer.

The poor gentleman—huddled up in a faded dressing-gown, made as it seemed of those Greek scarfs which were then so popular, with a dusty velvet *beret* on his head—

looked more ashy, more leaden, more yellow-eyed than ever;—his long reedy neck, and his gaunt hands, released from cuffs, adding to the appearance of lean misery. The Countess Montegrone might have been any age from fifty upwards—so sallow and dry was her cheek—and her black eyes so intensely staring as though she had overlooked this weary world as long as the wandering Jew himself.—Her dirty blue and white muslin was but imperfectly clasped at the throat, by an old-fashioned jewel of small value, but unmistakeable pedigree. Her cap of coarse mock-lace would have been despised by Nelkson, when it was new. She had a bluish beard on her upper lip—and she spoke in a harsh *contralto* voice as she got up, and somewhat brusquely inquired the pleasure of her guest. But Rosamond in that moment felt that she was a lady, and had been a beauty; and our widow reddened like a girl fresh from school, as in faltering bad French she tried to explain, how, having accidentally learned that Signor Montegrone was ill, she had called to inquire after him, and to see whether she could not be of some little use. "I too," said she sweetly, "am a stranger in

London, and perhaps hardly know what would be best to propose; but I feel how sad *you* must find it to be ill in a strange place"—and out came, awkwardly enough no doubt, an offer of carriage and servants,—the introduction of a basket of the freshest fruit, the sight and scent of which at once refined that squalid room (in spite of the fire)—and out came a stammering inquiry—Whether the signor had good medical advice?

"I have told my wife," said the poor gentleman, "of the charming young English lady whom I was reading with—She speaks very little French—you will excuse it, madame. Teresa, *mia cara*, this is to be in England! and you have all your life heard it blamed—the ladies especially, for being so cold!"

The poor lady made no answer, except her taking Rosamond's hand between her own two, and then raising it to her lips, might pass for reply. In truth she was so crushed, bewildered, disturbed, as to be almost past being cheered. Our widow, meanwhile, felt as much disposed to weep as she had often done in her life; but was restrained by a sort of cross fear that she was officious and blundering.

She had, Rosamond made haste to add, a country house—(she *would* have her there, and then inwardly determined a Richmond villa ere the day was out.) Would not the air, the rest, a garden, be good for the invalid ?—for both ? Would they give her the honour of their company there?

Alas ! her offer fell on dull ears—She was all goodness ; but they had declined another friend already. Mr. Shepherd had proposed change of air the day before ; but they could not go—they had no energy—They were expecting letters—they had friends who depended upon them—claims—business. No, they were obliged—(and here again Rosamond's pretty hand was in request for the grateful lips of the dejected Italian lady) but it could not be.

"Then," rejoined our widow, her courage rising under defeat, "unless I am to be treated as I do not deserve, you must let me speak plainly to you.—You must allow . . . remittances (I know myself in my husband's lifetime money never came when we expected it) may be delayed . . . I have nobody to consult but myself. Pray" (with a sort of gasp, and spasmodic snatch at her reticule), "treat

me like a friend, and let me—let me be your banker for awhile. This lodging is not fit for you!"

"*Brava!*" exclaimed the most musical voice which ever Rosamond had heard—not of course, poor Signor Montegrone's—and looking round in utter dismay at being thus overheard, she then for the first time remarked a large screen, covered with a tawdry paper-hanger's mosaic, behind which, so well as her beating heart would let her hear, she was aware that some one was moving. But strange are the ideas which shoot through the mind even in such a moment of nervous surprise. Rosamond's thought was—"Well, at least, that was not Mr. Shepherd this time."

"You had better come out, Salvatore, since the lady has heard you," said Madame Montegrone. "A dear friend of ours, Mrs. Westwood—a countryman. He is helping my husband, and had just hid himself when you came; handsome young men don't like to be seen when they are in their old clothes."

The hero who emerged in answer to this invocation *was* a handsome young man—if the epithet have any meaning; or rather,

indeed, beautiful he might have been called, in spite of the effeminate signification attached by some to that epithet. In place of those fierce jet Italian eyes which often promise so much more genius than is ever performed by their owner, his were of deep blue; fringed and arched with the glossiest black eyelashes and eyebrows. His forehead was as pale as a woman's, without any appearance of unnatural delicacy—his lips were bright and full: showing, when the symmetrical mouth opened, a range of white and regular teeth. If his features had not that expression of mingled intellect and character which we northern men are accustomed to require in a man—they wore that look of spirit and passion which no woman, at least—be she northern or southern—can resist. There was no mistaking, too, the undisguised yet not impudent admiration, which the lady inspired in this unexpected comer. Rosamond had met that pair of eyes before—she did not recollect where. It had been in ——'s shop, on the day when she had gone thither to inquire for a language-master.

The Adonis in question, it should be added, owed nothing to his dress nor to the occupa-

tion in which he was discovered. The former was an old *blouse* which had seen good service—and a scrutiny more curious than our widow was in any case to give, might have acquainted her that his hands had been intimately engaged in some culinary process—probably, the preparation of macaroni.

"We poor exiles," said he, laughingly coming forward with a sort of court air, and speaking bad French, "are glad to turn our little talents to account. I could always cook—and I am very glad of it now;—for really, madame, your London lodging-houses are not famous in that article of comfort."

"No, truly," chimed in the desolate Italian lady; and then she volubly ran over a list of affectionately-remembered home-dishes—things that, to Rosamond, it seemed strange, could come back to any one whom privations so much deeper surrounded. But, breaking from her momentary speculation, and turning to the new-comer, "I was endeavouring," said Mrs. Westwood, "to persuade the count and countess here to change the air of London for a week or two—to try our country air: and, if there be an Italian cook within reach, he shall be at their disposal."

"Thank you, madame," said the young gentleman, whose eyes emphasized his words, if ever eyes said aught; "but what would they do in your country—these? How amuse themselves! I am an old friend, and can take liberties; but I dare not propose such a thing to madame. She has a friend in the Opera-house who gives her a corner in her box;—and I think the music keeps life in her!"

"O could those Liverpool people hear this!" flashed across Rosamond's mind—"Sick, sad, starving, and going to the opera!" but the plea was obviously in earnest.

"And Salvatore there," interrupted Signor Montegrone, raising his heavy voice with difficulty; "our friend, Count Roccabella, madame, helps us—we must not go far from him. He is good enough to read with my pupils, for me—till I am better again. I was going to write and entreat you to accept him as my substitute; but my head is so confused that I cannot see paper to-day."

Rosamond hesitated. Had she declined Signor Capranico for this? "Why, I confess," said the young nobleman, who saw her hesitation, and therefore spoke in a tone

which told how proud he could be, "that I would rather cook for my friend here than attend to his scholars—I am a bad master, as madame would find; Marliani will be too glad to wait upon madame"—and, drawing Montegrone aside, the Count, Rosamond was convinced, was proposing some friendly escape from the arrangement at his—the Count's—expense.

"I should be truly sorry," said she, at last finding her voice, and blushing more than she wished to do, "to give any additional trouble—so bad a scholar as I am. If you think it worth while to help such a mere beginner, sir" (the 'sir,' Miss Grace Bessell might have heard), "I will do my best. And as we hope that it may only be for a very short period" . . . . .

The handsome young gentleman again drew himself up. Poor Rosamond! her speech was an awkward one—seemingly so English and ungracious! and the conviction of this flashed across her mind ere it was well spoken. Accordingly, to do away with such impression, she must needs run to the totally opposite extreme. It may be supposed that she was not long in making peace with one

who fixed upon her a gaze at once so impassioned and frank. And thus, provisionally at least, the handsomest man whom ever Milan saw, and the beautiful widow in Park-street, were, without the one caring to teach, or the other to learn, to sit down and study the story of Paolo and Francesca!—In one respect, Rosamond was contented with the arrangement. Thereby she might learn best how she could serve the Montegrones. The poor gentleman was so stupid—the poor lady so loudly gesticulating, that an interpreter betwixt them was an absolute necessity.

But she was haunted by the high manner of the Count Roccabella, and well recollecting how she had writhed when in a subordinate situation under insolences, she forgot that the most womanish of men is less sensitive than the most masculine of women. Did she forget how warmly she had shaken hands with her new acquaintance on their parting? And what made the scene with which my story opens, rise up before her like a cloud, and act itself over again as she drove homeward? What made her recollect that harsh, unkindly-spoken, slow-witted, un-

lovely man with whom she had passed so many years ?

From her involuntary musings or voluntary indulgence, she was dragged down in a summary fashion.

In the hall was Nelkson. "Company upstairs, me'm ! I thought you would like to know, previous. Company in the drawing-room: people who would not be said—who would wait till you came home;—though, if they have got any real business save to kill time and eat your luncheon, my cousin Anne married one of the Widgeons, instead of giving him the go-by."

"O, Miss Bessell ! The very person I wanted to see—I am truly glad she did stay. You forget yourself, Nelkson."

And the mistress hurried past the "*Well, I'm sure!*" of her astounded maid, with a vivacity such as she had not exhibited since her widowhood had began. "Something she has been about," soliloquized the Abigail —"and how to get into it ; that's just it. I wish Mr. Light would lend me a leaf out of his book—and I'll ask him, if I can, when he comes in to tea;—for come in to tea he will, as usual, I'll aver."

"Quite a bloom, dear Mrs. Westwood!" was the greeting of the languid Miss Grace as she raised herself on Rosamond's quick entrance. "How this air agrees with you! So it does with Lady Marcia, too. From the time she sets foot in Marbleton she pines and loses her sleep. Dr. Ossett maintains it is the lake; but I think that it is only the activity of her mind, and the powerful reaction after London. And what *is* there in the country worth living for, dear Mrs. Westwood?"

"Abundance of good neighbours," replied Rosamond rather gaily, "who know every step you take, and pass judgment upon it."

"Just like that Mr. Shepherd. The few times that I have come here—I find him, of course, hovering about. He has nothing to do save to haunt every body .... Lady Marcia says" .....

"Except to look after his workmen," broke in Rosamond, whose spirits seemed in a sort of hurry. "All this morning he might be heard, as often, I am sure, on a ladder—as not."

"On a ladder? Well, nothing surprises me that Mr. Shepherd resorts to, to com-

pass his ends. Whose ladder, pray, my dear?"

"I am sure I cannot tell you—for till last night I never had an idea that we were next door neighbours."

Nothing could be more comical than the countenance of Miss Grace, betwixt its desire to look cunning, and its real, vacant bewilderment. "Next . . . . door . . . neighbours," was all that she could utter for the moment. "Yes—I rather think—I am confident—I recollect to have heard Lady Marcia say that the next house was Mrs. Poulett Blackett's—before that sad business . . . . It is a love of a house, Lady Marcia says. Did you go over it? I forget . . . How very disagreeable to have that forward being so close to one" . . .

"So I fear you will find it, Miss Bessell: but for once, I may count upon your good-nature, may I not? You know I have few friends in London—If I ask two gentlemen to dinner you know I cannot receive them alone, and, if one should be this new neighbour of mine, will you countenance me, just for once. I can explain it all, strange and sudden though it seems. But will you?"

Good, simple Rosamond! little could she dream how dearly Miss Grace loved her at that moment! If there was a thing in the world that she enjoyed, it was a *partie quarrée*. "Mama would have been delighted, dear," continued she, "and be in every respect a greater acquisition than I; but so long as she is under Dr. Ossett's care, it distresses me to hear of her being asked to dine out! Friends in town! Who should have friends if not you, I wonder? Cordially I will, dear: when is your day?"

"And you understand who is to be of the party."

"My love, if we could not meet every one on the well-bred footing of amenity, what would London become? Lady Marcia, for instance, dines perpetually at the Toazles, though she refused Sir Nicholas Toazle twice before he married his present wife. These little feelings are to be conquered. . . . In society, The Honourable Mr. Tottington and myself converse . . . . And though we may laugh at one another's little peculiarities (such of us as cannot avoid penetration), I believe Mr. Shepherd to be as honest a creature as ever spoke his mind. A good wife would

soon have made him in every respect presentable. What other gentleman, pray?"

"Why," was the answer as Rosamond turned away to adjust the curtains—"I almost think I must ask you not to betray me to Mr. Bessell, knowing his aversion to foreigners. An Italian gentleman—a Count Roccabella,—a refugee, I believe—that is, if he *will* come."

"O, as to papa!—Papa is known in his own circle as the veriest John Bull. Much as they revere England at Marbleton, Lady Marcia says she could never have conceived *that* carried so far—O, yes! let us keep our little dinner a secret by all means—I am sure a word will silence Mr. Shepherd. It's just in his way to have confidences with ladies."

"Nay," said Rosamond, "you must not take me so literally. I certainly am a free agent, I hope and trust—and can invite whom I will to my own table. This Count Roccabella is coming to read Italian with me, a substitute for poor Signor Montegrone, who is very ill, and I fear in great poverty. And it is so difficult to be of use without seeming officious—and as I accidentally

heard of the circumstance from Mr. Shepherd" . . .

"O, indeed!—Yes, to be sure; just like Mr. Shepherd. He has his own ways and means of getting at intelligence. Were I in your position, dear, I should be nervous with such a neighbour as he."

"Better then, perhaps, to be on good than upon bad terms with him," replied Mrs. Westwood a little archly; since a dream was beginning to cross her mind, which she found, in her present buoyant humour, exquisitely whimsical.

"Good terms!" was the sharp and instant response. "Good terms do not mean encouraging intimacy, I hope and trust—Mr. Shepherd is any thing but a safe man for one in your position, my dear, to receive. We—as Lady Marcia could assure you" . . . and Miss Grace here made motions with her lips and looked down—a favourite device of hers when matter for talk failed her.

"But how am I forgetting papa's message—one dinner driving another so completely out of my head!—I was to tell you, with his love (nay, old gentlemen may be gallant), that your commission is as good as executed,

and that he wants to see you about some money story connected with it—and begs you will dine with us to-morrow. I hope that does not interfere? Papa's time is any time."

"I suspect that he would hardly agree to that assertion, Miss Bessell. He has been only too kind in seeing after this matter, which I have had much at heart: and I shall be glad to say so to-morrow. *Our* dinner could hardly be this week—but now that I find you will oblige me, I am much tempted to try it. If it fail, I need never give another."

"*Quelle idée?* Fail, indeed! I have not looked forward with so much pleasure to a dinner this year, my dear. From the first moment that I heard the sound of your voice (I am like Lady Marcia, sensitive about voices, I own it), I knew we should suit each other thoroughly."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A PARTIE QUARRÉE.

By others than Miss Grace this improvised entertainment was regarded as an occasion of peculiar solemnity and importance.

"I do hope, and supplicate, me'm," said Nelkson, when the fact of the coming dinner arrived at her domain,—also the certain intelligence that Mr. Shepherd had rubbed a new pair of gloves into holes, in the fulness of his satisfaction at being invited to sit at the board of the charming widow—"I do beg and represent, me'm, that you'll dine without your cap. Six months is the longest weeds now, me'm, that ladies indulge in ; unless the circumstances have been peculiarly harrowing. Or if a cap it must be, pray let me make you up something a little less hideous, with one or two quiet cameleons, or other white flowers.

I don't think that if I had married Mr. Duckling's favourite son (as we say in Flintshire), and if he had spoiled me ever so much, I could acquiesce in reducing myself into a spectacle because I lost him."

"I shall make no change, Nelkson," was Rosamond's quiet reply—"Well, me'm, it's superfluously vexatious, I will say, when one thinks of the display that some of us will make. Bare neck enough to thatch a house! no matter if it's somewhat of the oldest—though white, I admit."

"Nelkson!"

"I beg your pardon, me'm; but like that Miss Grace I could not, if all my aunt Eliza's money was to go to the Raggs in consequence. She won't captivate Mr. Shepherd, however, with all her swimming airs and tuneful graces—I can tell her that!"

It was impossible for Rosamond to refrain from smiling at this last sally: recollecting as she did the incessant disdain of Miss Grace. But "every little helps," and this toilet gossip, foolish as it was, assisted to fix our heroine's attention on her dinner. She grew nervous, lest she should seem nervous; and to steady herself she thought of

Mrs. Chidley and Mrs. James Rick. Fortunately it fell out, that Miss Grace thought herself called upon to be instructive, which at once brought back our widow to her composure.

"The Count, of course, will take you down—Mr. Shepherd will sit opposite to you. No foreign gentleman can ever carve. Lady Marcia says that she would rather do it herself a thousand times over, than sit by and see them attempt it."

"*You* will be opposite me, I hope, Miss Bessell," was Rosamond's quiet answer. "In so small a party there can be no formality. Here, I suppose, are the gentlemen!"

* * * *

The dinner of four went over pleasantly enough, in spite of all those covert sympathies and antipathies which make such strange work, when they are brought into play among such few persons. Miss Grace was considerately sparing of Mr. Shepherd, considering how fervently she had again and again vowed to put him down (with Lady Marcia's full concurrence) on meeting him. At her dear Rosamond's first dinner, the Amazon consented to lay by her arms, and to hold out

the golden sceptre—nay more, she was moved to provoke her favourite aversion, with appeals and courtesies, by the gentleman's quiet and polite disregard. With Shropshire race-balls did she ply him. She enlightened him as to the plan on which the orchis house at Marbleton was heated—somewhat reckless as to pipe and chimney statistics.—She discovered, for the first time in her life, that bay was her favourite colour in a horse. She dealt side looks of loving patronage at her unsuspicious hostess, expressive of the utmost female amiability. But this beautiful behaviour of hers was in some measure damaged by circumstances. Count Roccabella protested against being asked to talk English; what general conversation there was, therefore, was carried on in French, though Rosamond blushed as she did her best. In the French language, a maidenly and dignified economy of "*oui's*," and "*est-il possible's?*" most neatly suited the acquirements of Miss Grace.

Mr. Shepherd in his turn proved less obtrusively voluble than he had been depicted. Eat and drink he did, as a healthy gentleman with a good appetite should do.

He praised the dishes as much as a well-bred man may do. He talked park to Rosamond and opera to the Count. He expatiated to the purpose and with wonderful amenity upon all the range of charming topics disclosed by Miss Grace. Had our widow been disposed to watch him, she might have observed a certain twinkle in his eyes and curl in his lip, which bespoke a general's admiration of his own successful generalship, and assurance of his final triumph. But Rosamond saw little—and only thought of one solitary person—her right-hand neighbour.

She was not, however, thinking of his magnificent face or musical voice—so much as listening with all her eyes, ears, and heart, to all that he was pouring out about Italy.—They had entered on that subject, *apropos* of the Montegrones—but it was the one beyond all other subjects calculated to captivate Rosamond. Women never sympathize with success so passionately as they do with failure. How was she to stop and to sum up the rights and the wrongs of a question which her heart had already decided?—how was she, with a charmer at her ear—so earnest, so enthusiastic—so different, said her fancy, from "your

cold calculating ungenial Englishmen!" Her very soul was melted within her, at this picture of a foreign nobleman stooping to menial services—and to an equivocal position in this hard cruel London of ours, because he would no longer abide or endure tyranny—banished from the magnificent palaces of his forefathers, and from a climate the very breathing of which was luxury, bliss, intoxication . . . Not that Count Roccabella was a show patriot—a man who wears his grievances and his sacrifices on his sleeve, for every daw to peck at. But he had, at last, found a listener so warm, rapt, ready as only Englishwomen can be:—he had at last lighted on chords which had been long waiting to thrill.

When the four simultaneously established themselves in the drawing-room after dinner (the reconciliation of Nelkson to that foreign procedure required all Mr. Light's *savoir vivre*)—Rosamond claimed from the Count his promise to tell her how matters really stood with his friends. "Mr. Shepherd," said she, "alluded to something so dark and terrible, that the mind almost refuses to receive such an idea nowadays. Does Signor Montegrone really ascribe his present wretched health

to the consequences of poison given to him? Can it have indeed been so—and from no accident?"

"Ascribe, madam!" was the reply, with an explosion of emotion—(and Rosamond thought that the face beside her had the grandeur and the animation of that of an avenging Archangel)—"Ascribe! Yes, you in England can speak about these things, as if they were matters of question—and matters of chance. Thank your God that you can! —Ascribe!—You, who do not know what a Jesuit is, save in a picture-book, may well ask me about the history, just as if it was one of a party of pleasure. But we cannot answer so—we Italians!—Montegrone was poisoned by those Jesuits, so surely as you are a living woman, and a beautiful one—so surely as that is not the only murder of theirs which I will avenge—before I am an old man, too!"

"Mr. Shepherd" . . . broke out a voice, in the most different tone possible:—"You play at chess, don't you? You used, I think I have heard my papa say, to be a great chess-player. When I sit down with Lady Marcia, I can give her always a pawn or two; but, if you will engage me" . . . .

"It goes to my heart, Miss Grace, to decline a lady's challenge," replied the gallant master of Shepherdston; "but I am no match for you—in town. If I am to sit down to chess, it must not be after such a luxurious banquet as our fair hostess here has been giving us—in the very midst of the London season, and on a night when there is thunder in the air. Play is play—study, study—I never *play* at chess . . . . and (don't think me a bear) I am not equal to work just now.—But I will take up your glove whenever you please, after the long vacation.—May *we*, too, not hear your narrative, M. le Comte?" continued he, approaching the impassioned Italian.

"O, pray permit us," chimed in Miss Grace—since chess was not to be.—"What are books—even Mrs. Gore's sweet tales—compared with the romance of real life!"

"I am not a *raconteur*," said the Italian, suddenly interrupting himself with that fitful haughtiness—that sort of proud, spoiled-child air, which most women would have found so irresistible: "and the *young* lady" (bowing to Miss Bessell) "would, perhaps, find little to interest her in the story.—I

cannot speak of these things like so many romances. A Frenchman could: but they have neither faith nor feeling."—With that the Count rose abruptly, as if he wanted air, and walked to the window, past which flashes of summer lightning were beginning to glance at tolerably frequent intervals.

"Did I hear you talk of chess-playing?" said Rosamond, any thing but pleased at the intrusion. "The board and the men are . . . . Mr. Shepherd, will you do me the favour to ring?"

"Not for a chess-board, Mrs. Westwood. One of the combatants shows the white feather to-night: and well may he do so, when his antagonist is so redoubtable a foe as Miss Grace. . . . Besides, two duetts among a party of four are two too many. —What lightning!"

Miss Grace found that her head ached, and that the evening was *too* airless. Accordingly, disappointed of chess, she bethought herself of other diversions, and sailed majestically to the window—from which Count Roccabella was looking out, rapt in a not very cheerful reverie. A somewhat deep inspiration, not to call it a sigh, failed to arouse his atten-

tion; on which Miss Grace was compelled to set her French in battle array, for the purpose of asking the Count "whether he preferred La Bettina or La Carolina, as dancers. Of music," continued the woman of Bloomsbury fashion, "no one speaks or thinks more. The best opera is so" . . . . . and Miss Grace—or her French—after ambling a little, came to a full stop.

"I don't know any thing about your *ballet* in London, madame," was the Count's cold reply.

Hard to bear as the Count's "*Madame*" was, Miss Grace, nevertheless, was rehearsing such other overtures and topics as might prove sympathetic and fascinating to the Italian: such also as, perhaps, might bring Mr. Shepherd back with some due sense of his loss, and her condescension. But she had not finished preparing a clumsy platitude about Dante, to the effect that he was "a great writer," when the victim addressed, turning the full gaze of his lustrous eyes upon her, and aware, so it seemed, of her aggressive intentions, burst from her with a sweeping bow, and an impatient frown—and, without formal good night to Rosamond or Mr. Shepherd,

and almost to the overthrow of Nelkson, who chanced (as frequently happened) to be on the staircase—was gone;—gone, with the tale of the Jesuit and the poisons—untold;—gone, before the three persons left behind could look at each other—two of them more amazed than edified by his impetuosity.

"Your new friend seems a rather violent person, my dear," said Miss Grace; with a swan-like toss of her neck, and a recovery from the same, as though she would eat her own bouquet—"Lady Marcia has again and again remarked, that she never met an Italian with any conversation: and your Count Roccabella seems to add to his accomplishments in that respect, a want of manner which . . . . . perhaps" (coiling herself up and down for a death-blow) "papa would say is republican."

"He is, at all events," said Mr. Shepherd, who seemed to take pleasure in contradicting Miss Grace, "the handsomest man I ever saw.—The Roccabellas have been always known, throughout Lombardy, for their beauty as a family."

"You see, my dear," whispered Miss Bessell, edging herself close to Rosamond;

"it is who but *we* can judge! *You* don't think Count Roccabella handsome, I am sure. Lady Marcia detests that style of man —but see, whenever we can bring in a word about our Italian travels, any occasion of laying down the law is never lost!—I would not live next door to Mr. Shepherd, my dear, for any bribe."

"Why"—replied our heroine, with a quiet and ambiguous smile,—"the next house *is* a better one than this" . . . .

"But"—was Rosamond's soliloquy when all was over, and when Mr. Shepherd had, after some lingering, taken leave, and when Miss Grace had been despatched eastwards; —"I will not be cheated out of my story of the Count Montegrone and the Jesuits. I do not wonder that he could not tell it when they were by." And in the secret of her own heart, our widow that evening made a cross opposite to Miss Grace Bessell's name, very nearly as black as Nelkson's mark of criticism.

"Though it would make my mother out a Baxter to profess the contrary," said the Abigail, when she attended her lady, "I should persist in declaring that gown of Miss

Bessell's a blue ugly enough to turn milk sour.—And she did not find her dinner to her liking; which is a comfort!—I heard her humming to herself, 'Come, where the aspens quiver,' all the way down-stairs—and which means that she was in a bad humour and wanted to hide it, so sure as my name is not Higgins—when she set off a-singing."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE GOOD FAIRY.

While Rosamond was thus counting experiences, with which no previous training had qualified her to cope, we Bells had good, grateful reason to enjoy the magic of her wealth, and therefore to imagine—foolishly enough, possibly—that its owner must be the happiest woman in the world.

It was the close of a hot summer day; business was slack, and people were sickly. A small venture in which I had embarked more money than was prudent, threatened to take bad ways—and the apprehension of loss, I have remarked, is always far worse to bear than the loss itself when that comes. My wife had that lead coloured hue, which cries for change of air as loud as a complexion can cry—and there was no treating her with change. My lame boy was visited by a fit

of desponding perversity. Our little Martha looked pale and depressed; and spoke in a measured voice—sure sign that she was trying to keep down irritability. Rumours had been out all day, that the anti-manufacturing ministry was coming in. When our windows were opened, the drains of the neighbourhood were offensively perceived. The milk for our tea had turned sour, and I made a cross and utterly incoherent remark upon it, to the effect that "nobody had taken any trouble to make any one properly comfortable, since Rosamond had gone up to London!"

My wife's tart answer was ready—and who knows how far we might have gone, had it been emitted—when the knock of Louis, our girl Martha's betrothed, was heard at the door. Louis had long ceased to be treated as "company" in Halcyon Row: but it was a relief to be obliged to put our tempers upon their company "behaviour."

A glance at his face told us that he brought some surprising news. Across the room he walked, without saying "good evening" to myself or my wife—right across the room to our Martha: and ere she could

speak to him, her mouth was stopped by a kiss, as emphatic as it was public—a kiss which might have been heard at Number Three, supposing that any of our quick-eared next door neighbours had (as usual) been listening.

"Name the day, Martha!" cried Louis with a hilarity which some would have thought unbefitting the church—"Name the day, Mrs. Bell! . . . You know what I have been so long promised as soon as I should get a curacy. When shall it be? I have got—got . . . No, I have got no curacy!—She has given me a vicarage". . . . and Louis fairly burst into tears.

I cannot pretend to write down the Babel of tongues—the positive *squall* of inquiry, congratulation, wonder, misgiving and ecstasy, which burst from my wife, my son, my daughters—even from our eldest, who is a deaf, dear apathetic girl—and from three or four miscellaneous youngsters whom there is no need to name.

"When you will let me speak?" cried Louis at last. . . . "I will tell you if you have not guessed—Your cousin—dear Mrs. Westwood—here's her letter."

"Greater excitement instantaneously fol-

lowed this announcement: a louder outcry. There was some danger that the document announcing the fairy gift might be torn in pieces—so eager were the contending hands—so violent the conflict of "*Let me!*" "*Dear Rosamond!*" "*Heaven bless her!*"—and like rapturous outbreaks. But they presently merged into the general cry of "Martha! the letter belongs to Martha—Let Martha read it aloud."

Now my little grave daughter was shy—even in her own family; but she had been brought up to do what was desired from her, and her voice trembled more than ever—no wonder—as she took up the paper and began:—

"DEAR COUSIN LOUIS,

(Here I stopped a gush from my wife, moved by the sweet, relation-like address,)

"The Vicarage of Grayhouse—somewhere in Yorkshire or Lancashire (you know I am no geographer)—has fortunately" (*accidentally* had been scratched out) "fallen into my gift. Will you oblige me by taking possession of it—that is, if you are still disposed to be my cousin—and to bestow it on

Miss Martha Bell. I think I was told, when I was in Manchester, that some doubts with respect to preferment hindered you both from making two people very happy—God bless you !—Affectionately yours,

"ROSAMOND WESTWOOD."

"Dear—good—delightful—generous Rosamond !" was the simultaneous cry. "She has done it on purpose," was my wife's remark—incoherent, howsoever natural.

"But where is Grayhouse ?—not in Northumberland, I hope !"

Louis was ready, there and then, with his geography.—Grayhouse was on the edge of the Fells, he explained, about thirty-five or thirty-seven miles from Manchester: in a warm, quiet, sheltered nook. The vicarage was an excellently good one—worth from three to four hundred a-year; besides a beautiful house, and a delightful garden.

I saw the large slow tears chasing each other, one by one, down my little daughter's face. She never had much to say; neither when she was very happy, nor when she was greatly in pain . . . but she looked across half timidly at Louis, with a smile of such

full contentment and perfect happiness, that I felt not only that our own choice had from the first been right—but also that our child was entirely satisfied as to her own future.

Yes—Rosamond had put one of her favourite day-dreams into execution. She had made two human creatures, radiantly—exquisitely happy, and at the moment when they least expected it;—when they could not entertain any expectation that their cares or fortunes were recollected by any one. How we spent the rest of the evening, which had commenced so dismally, I need hardly describe.

My wife was particularly wordy on this occasion,—betwixt her pride and her cautions, and her joviality, and her curiosity; and her fixed resolution to trample upon the Misses Le Grand who had disparaged the match, and her own protestations against any intentions expressed or understood of darkening the prospects of her beloved children by interference.—How many times she sent her love to Mrs. Marshall, the mother of Louis, I shall not pretend to count. Then she wandered away into domestic and rural suggestions: told some frantic tale of gains

derived from bee-keeping, to which she heroically proposed that our Martha's pin-money should be restricted,—was self-contradictory on the number of maids which appearance would demand, and prudence forbid—with a digression towards "a treasure" such as she understood the cousin of Mrs. Nelkson to be. And with that name, down came, as though it had been pulled with a string, a positive shower of grateful and loving words, about that "dear, dear Rosamond!" Who could have expected such thoughtfulness from her?—But no munificence could surprise from that source! And then to think of the darling's noble, forgiving temper—after all the things against "Woman's emancipation" to which she had been treated in our house!—and after our having refused to give her Martha for her companion!—It was unheard of!—It was splendid! It would give Mrs. Rick a fit of bilious fever! And *would not* she and Mrs. Chidley abuse us when they got together? O! there was never any thing in the world so delightful—so perfect in every respect. And to think of Grayhouse being only forty miles from Halcyon Row! It would

be less than a step, when the railroad was made.

It was far in the night before the passion of amazement and happiness had subsided. With the morning came—not counsel, but a letter, long and a little incoherent, from our child's benefactress, addressed to my wife. That good woman, however, was loth that any one should read the epistle besides herself. Rosamond—said she mysteriously—was not one of those whose productions were intended to be shown—Quite the contrary. When she wrote in spirits—she made use of expressions sometimes . . . . . "In short," was Mrs. Bell's conclusion, "the best method of not being tempted is to get beyond temptation—and so, my love, without waiting your good pleasure, I burned Rosamond's letter—and have forgotten every word that was in it; yes, I have! She's a good, affectionate, imprudent, divine creature, that Rosamond—and I would give any thing" . . . . . and off went my wife into a flood of hysterical tears, which she only wiped up to talk about Martha's wedding.

This was enough, it will be owned, to make any parent anxious: and, if I fancied,

for a day or two, that my girl's good-luck might prove one of those fairy gifts which have the bad trick of turning into trash, who can wonder?—I felt that I should be better satisfied when I had seen Grayhouse with my own eyes. And, heedless of the construction put upon the proceeding by my wife, who insisted (according to her habit) that I only wanted an excuse for a ramble—to Grayhouse I went.

I was charmed with what I saw there. The place looked as little like fairyland, and as much like a home for real, cheerful, mortal happiness as ever spot that I beheld. The vicarage stands high up, in a notch of the hills; a low grey house, with a very large porch, in the midst of a flower-garden, canopied by about a score of tall fir-trees, so old that their bare stems are many a yard higher than the roof top; thus allowing the freest circulation of air. Some quarter of a mile lower down the brow, close by the brook, which swells into a torrent after rain, is the little old church — like the vicarage, warded by fir-trees — and approached by half a dozen paths, which creep up and over the moorland; the end of more

than one of which is a substantial grange or homestead—or some other *oasis* of trees, sheltering its cluster of cottages. Those who stand at the vicarage gate overlook a wide and busy plain dotted with villages—a gentleman's seat or two, belonging to past times—and here and there a factory chimney, which, supposing it called an obelisk, might be admired as an object.—The place at once charmed me: it looked so breezy, but not bleak—and I could fancy our child sitting in the windows of her pretty parlour, as her fingers sewed, letting her mind roam over all that valley view—and all the human life and activity which it comprehended. But I was obliged to tell Mrs. Bell on my return, that as regarded Martha's keeping of bees, I feared she must make up her mind to some disappointment.—There *must* be a crook in every lot!—So ill was my jest taken, that, since that day, we have avoided the subject of honey—and also that of Rosamond's letter to Mrs. Bell, which no one was allowed to read.

There was nothing unreal about Grayhouse—no obstacle to the induction of Louis Marshall into its occupancy as vicar. We

perceived, too, with pleasure, that he was one of those persons whose nature success expands and softens. His happiness, my wife declared, made him handsome, besides taking away that dry and pedantic air which had been apt to try our patience. Till then, he had been rather more violently disposed towards politics than young clergymen should be—but the sense of his new responsibilities seemed to drive out the spirit of wrangling and setting-to-rights, which we had feared might play tricks with our little Martha's happiness. He was bent on being a wise and kind parish priest—on living an active life, for the good of others—but still on enjoying life for himself a little. Our daughter one day quietly told him, that she believed he had only one drawback to his perfect satisfaction, which was that there was no *Saint* Rosamond. "But, Louis," she added gravely, "we must never let our gratitude grow old: some day or other it may stand her in stead—far above us as she is now. Must she not be asked to the wedding, mother?" How could any of us foresee—save my Mrs. Bell, who always declares that she is never surprised at any thing—what would be passing in Rosamond's

mind ; even before the early days of October, for which the wedding was fixed, and the favour of her gracious presence requested ? The day of our receiving the news of Martha's good fortune, was the day anticipated with such animation by Miss Grace Bessell—to quote that lady's own words—the day of Mrs. Westwood's first dinner.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SUBLIME AND THE RIDICULOUS.

So rapid—so rude had been Count Roccabella's departure, that Rosamond thought it possible he might find some excuse to absent himself when the lesson-day came round again; and when, instead of being a guest, he was to wait upon her as a teacher.—Roccabella, however, came at the appointed hour, but so proud and forbidding was his manner when he entered, that his pupil almost wished he had stayed away. "Dante, I think, you were reading with my friend Montegrone?" he began at once, after a very cold greeting; "will you show me where you stopped?"

"Not to-day," said Rosamond, laying her hand on the book with a smile, "we will not read to-day—you shall talk to me in Italian, instead; and I will try to understand you.

That is a good exercise, is it not? You know," continued she, with her own persuasive look, "that I depend on you for the story of poor Signor Montegrone's misfortunes. I love Italy—I have plenty of time—plenty of money. What better can I do than use them in a good cause?—but if I am not to use them as a stranger, which means awkwardly or mischievously, you must trust me—and you may, I think, without fear of harm."

"Harm!" was the answer, in a fervent tone, which no Northern could ever emulate, "harm from you!"—and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, Count Roccabella bowed over her hand and kissed it.

"My tale would give you no pleasure," he continued, his countenance again becoming stormy. "You would not believe it—you would make light of it—and that I could not bear! No, no! we Italians had better not speak of our sufferings; you Northerns will not feel for us—you cannot understand us! you are so proud, so happy, in your own security. But take care, take care! it may fail you one day."

It was not easy to interrupt such a torrent

of emotion—even to assure the speaker that he judged the English harshly; or, if not the English in general, my heroine in particular. But Rosamond was seen, if she was not heard. Her glistening eyes testified for her; and (perhaps) encouraged by them, Count Roccabella began his story in an excited, broken fashion which defies the reporter's art.

The story sounded in Rosamond's ear like a tale of another world—a world of corn and wine, of fig-trees and olives—of rich palace-gardens smiling by the side of deep waters, of belfries high up the hills, of chestnut woods, among the roots of which clear brooks hurried down to join some mountain stream—a world in which, bright above and beyond all, shone the peaks of snow Alps, telling of another country, and another climate without their magical barrier. "You cannot conceive the beauty of our lakes," said Count Roccabella. "I have seen yours, and *can* make the comparison.—What a sun we have there! At my father's palace, on the Lake of Como, we children used to live all the day long in the plane-tree walk, close by the water-side. If it rained, the leaves

were so thick that we felt no rain. And then our gardens! We have not all your quantity of neat, damp, green grass to make us miserable;—but we have oleander-trees and roses, and American creepers growing up to the top of the cypresses, and marble statues and marble steps coming down to the water's edge; and cradle-walks, covered with such vines! I must not talk about my country; it is *not* living to endure existence elsewhere, when one thinks of such a home, and remembers that one is shut out of it by those German swine!—But they shall pay for it—they shall!" and the speaker dashed a few drops from his eyelashes as, abruptly changing his tone, he said, "Let us read Dante."

"May I not, then, hear the story of your friend Count Montegrone?" said Rosamond timidly. "I love so to hear about Italy."

"It kills one to speak of our country under such a sombre, leaden climate as yours. And so easily could we be happy there, if those despots and priests would let us! The Montegrones would never have joined in the movement but for their being never employed—but for their having been

perpetually thwarted, set aside, interfered with—and all this merely because the head of the family—him you know—happened to be an enlightened and cultivated man, who had no love of going to confession, and who spoke his mind sometimes about those 'brutal Germans.' There were two brothers, and a sister—Aurelia. Your friend was nearly twenty-five years older than the two others. They were both of them magnificently beautiful, Aurelia especially, when she was a girl. If you were not an Englishwoman, you would have a passionate look in your eyes, reminding me of what hers was, before she was destroyed."

"Destroyed!"

"Your voice, too, when you speak in earnest, reminds me of my poor Aurelia's. Yes, destroyed she was! the life ground out of her heart by those priests; practised upon, till she became an idiot in their hands. They early found that—since she was forbidden to marry where . . . *we* were to have been married once! . . . . . she would listen to no suitor of her priest's choosing.—They had their man ready, but she would not hear his name mentioned—and since she durst not

marry where they forbade, she said she would be a nun. That pleased them just as well: any thing that broke up the family—any thing that moved an influence out of their way!

"This first roused up the Count, her eldest brother—he might else have read his Rousseau by the lake side to the end of his life—and have done nothing—being a scholar by nature. He was much attached to me—we were neighbours—and he had let me play about him after my father's death as if I had been his own child . . He was very fond of his beautiful sister, and would have made her read with him (his wife yonder was never a companion)—only that, too, of course, those priests would not allow."

"Would not allow! Good heavens!" exclaimed Rosamond, indignantly—"And he allowed their '*would not allow!*'—the head of a family."

"You know nothing about it, madam! though I do not wonder at your beautiful anger!—As if you could understand how those vermin, when once they have made a home in a house, WILL never quit it till they have humbled it, or revenged themselves! Allow!—That man—their priest—had

taught Aurelia to read—he had closed the eyes of Aurelia's mother when she died. There was not a servant about the place that was not afraid of him—yet that did not love him. A meek-looking creature he was, with a smile like an angel's—who crept in and out, nobody knew where or when—he was so quiet. Montegrone could not have prevented his sister from going to mass—and he would not if he could. They told him what would come of his liberality: but liberal he would be, throughout—liberal, even to bigotry. The fool!—and dearly has he paid for it!

"But he made some attempts to get poor Aurelia out of their power. I was proud and passionate—I would not speak! She was sensitive—and listened to their diabolical advice all the more easily, because my family was rich and hers was ruined. So she thought herself generous in giving me up.—And this weighed with them all: but Montegrone *did* try—he did talk to her about her melancholy ways—took her to Milan: wanted to carry her to Paris:—and would have done so, only just then he had to attend to Camillo's affairs, too. Camillo was their

brother, a fine dashing fellow, who laughed at the priests—but as he did not read, and led a wild life, being in the army, it made no matter.—They let him laugh on as he liked: for those people are as subtle as they are stupid—and yet the idea of a Montegrone joining the *Carbonari*, never occurred to any one among them as possible. So they contented themselves with flinging all sorts of temptation in Camillo's way—and making him as profligate as they could.—You may well turn red, madam! to hear of such vileness; even I, who am no saint, dare not tell you half that those holy men dare do. . . . By and bye their time will come! Camillo gambled: he intrigued: wherever he went he was famous for his debauchery as well as for his beauty. It was on this account that his brother would not go to Paris. There was a certain Marchesa Della Brianza from whom Camillo was not to be detached—a fiend in human form—a spy of the Austrians. She had literally flung herself at Camillo, and . . . . . I forget myself . . . One must speak so cautiously in England: because you have no great crimes or great passions in your country."

Rosamond could not justify her countrywomen; but Count Roccabella's slightly contemptuous tone gave her a pain, not unlike an echo of some of her former secret thoughts and discontents.

"The Marchesa," continued the narrator, "it was settled by those priests, was to make sure of Camillo—to occupy him so, that no free influence could reach him. As for Aurelia, the delay in her journey to Paris was providential—an answer to their prayer. She would not yet escape them! So when the Count and Countess Montegrone absolutely invited the Della Brianza down to their villa for the summer, and Camillo with her—the priests were satisfied that every thing was in a right train. Let the dreaming Montegrone try his strength against her and them—it would occupy his time and prevent him from doing mischief. They knew which was the strongest."

"But am I to believe, really," interrupted good, simple Rosamond, crimsoning intensely with emotion—"that such things are done—that such people exist?"

"As priests?" was Count Roccabella's answer—in the bitterest tones of mortal

sarcasm. "I dare say you have hypocrites or schemers even in this pure, cold, calculating England of yours—even in what you call your church !—Yes ; the thing was as I tell you. Down they all came together, to our lake, to pass the summer. I was away—since I did not wish to meet. . . . . since under the circumstances I thought that Aurelia might be distressed to see me !—and to fill my mind, and to divert my thoughts from preying upon themselves, I had flung myself into *the* cause ! So chance rules every thing ! and if I serve my Italy—what matters the misery which broke all human ties and flung me into her service ! Hearts that bleed have little fear of the battle field, or the rack or the scaffold !" And once more, tears—tears which Rosamond saw that her fiery guest was struggling to repress —glistened in those wonderful Italian eyes. She half repented of her curiosity, when she saw how much its gratification cost her visiter.

"I continued writing to Montegrone," resumed Count Roccabella, for I knew he was sorry for me, and would be glad to know that I was bracing up my mind with

noble purposes, and for our country's good; and by degrees that quiet, shy, learned, thoughtful man, began to write more and more warmly to me about the cause: less and less like a bystander. Perhaps he may have begun to speak unguardedly in his family circle. If so, the Della Brianza of course heard, and reported what she heard, to her employers. They decided, no doubt, that the case was one to be dealt with peremptorily!—She had her instructions. If the calm spirit of the elder brother was but a little further enkindled—that of her Camillo, too, might take fire! He was already nearly satiated with aimless pleasure; she might lose him, and she did not intend to lose him yet. So Montegrone was to be silenced—indulged with other subjects of contemplation—made stupid. His mind was to be killed—she was to set about it at once;—she did so. It was one evening late in the summer." . . . . .

"I beg your pardon, me'm!" said Nelkson speaking quickly, though she opened the door so quietly as to make Rosamond start, "I beg your pardon, me'm, owing to Grossmith having stepped out with Mr. Shepherd's valley! But Miss Grace Bessell is below,

and, having seen Count Roccabella's hat, she says that, since you are not alone, she is sure you will see her. And up she is!—Here is Miss Grace Bessell!"

"Pray, dear, make no ceremony with me!" said the languid lady, making a large circuit as she entered, and then sinking theatrically into an easy-chair with a magnificent smile of melancholy affability, shed full on Count Roccabella—"Pray, dearest, if you have not finished reading Dante—read on. Rest I must, and rest I never find any where such as I find in this delicious chair. What can take Lady Marcia to Marbleton I can't conceive, on a day like this: she who hates hot weather so! Why, you, with merely sitting over your Italian, look flushed and overheated—*n'est ce pas?* Signor Roccabella?"

"You wished to see me," said Rosamond, with some difficulty mustering her presence of civility—and not, it must be confessed, mustering it with any very good effect.

"My love, we were all getting uneasy about your seclusion: since the day of that exquisite little dinner. We were sure that something must be the matter with you!

Papa, too—you cannot conceive what a favourite you are grown with papa—has three times said to me—'Grace, go and see after Mrs. Westwood—I am afraid she must be ill. Pray, Count Roccabella, do not move. I am distressed to have deranged the lesson: and am going in an instant!"

"When can you come again?" said Rosamond, looking steadily at Miss Grace, while she held out a friendly hand to the Italian. "To-morrow? Your time I know is precious; but pray, come again to-morrow if you *can*—and we will finish the passage."

"My love," began Miss Grace almost ere the door had closed—and ambling as she sat with airs and graces more sweeping than usual—"What *would* censorious people say, if they had seen that smile of yours? Indulgence itself!—and, if other people should fancy it, even something beyond indulgence, who can blame them, dearest?"

Never was there beauty less fitted to bandy faded compliments and pointless jokes than Rosamond. She had no more sprightly answer at command than an inquiry after Miss Bessell, the invalid—soon answered; a second after Mrs. Bessell, answered as briefly;

and a third after "her kind legal adviser," for Rosamond did feel that Mr. Bessell meant to be kind to her in his legal and advising way.

"Papa is as well as an overworked man can be, my dear: taking interest in every thing and in every body, as usual—and just now, so uneasy about you. I must soften that sweet parting smile of the Count's when I give a report of my call to him."

"Uneasy—what can make Mr. Bessell uneasy about me?"

"My love, we all know what the old school is. Often and often have Lady Marcia and myself combated papa's wholesale antipathy to foreigners, though Lady Marcia is selectness personified. Some of them are really interesting people. But since that *esclandre* at the Tatts'—combat we may in vain. Papa warned Mrs. Tatt to be cautious in admitting so many refugees: and we see what a sad business has come of it."

"O, I understand!" said Rosamond with a little blush as usual—at once roused and composed by the innuendo. "You mean that Mr. Bessell would disapprove of my forming any foreign friendship. What has been the

sad business which is to serve for example? —I don't think I have ever heard you mention the name of the family."

"The Tatts?—Why, we avoid the name now: and even when we did visit, though they were neighbours, we never knew them well. People far too eccentric for our tastes.—Mrs. Tatt was always putting forward her daughters to let down their hair and act in charades; and I saw her set up for a Sybil herself, in a *tableau*, long after her youngest grandchildren—Mr. Hampden Tatt's, I mean —were born. Then they were oftener at the Turkish embassy than even mamma thought becoming; since indeed, neither Lady Marcia or myself could give our verdict to the Odalisque style of society. Only think of their affording to such a person as Mr. Shepherd occasion to say, that, cheap as they were, no Mussulman would buy them.—Such strange and conspicuous women!—Clarinda Tatt had a painting-room, and a real skeleton instead of a lay figure, and it stood in the windows, sometimes with a shawl over it—sometimes with none; so shocking, love, you know! Then she was particularly fond of taking portraits of all her friends. Now, to

stare for half an hour together in any gentleman's face *is*, I am sure . . . ." (and here Miss Grace ambled again, unable to blush.) "The Tatts were, at all events, quite too much for us; and from the time when Porphyria contradicted papa at his own table about the influence of the Duke in the Peninsula—we began to draw out of the acquaintance. People were there always whom nobody knew: strange men, with names ending in *etti* and *isky*—cooks and couriers out of place, Mr. Shepherd says. Porphyria Tatt (by the way) would have been very glad to be Mrs. Shepherd."

Rosamond sighed:—simply because the flow of words was becoming oppressive.

"My love, did I hear you sigh?—Am I to wish that your next door neighbour had heard it too? And so soon after that smile! Already fickle! Not that papa would not be delighted to hear it."

"What has happened at the Tatts'?" interrupted her hostess—who detested the lady's-maid style of pleasantry in which Miss Grace and Lady Marcia (to judge from report) seemed adepts.

"Well, as I said, this is the way that the

Tatts have been going on for years; one day working a banner for the Poles—another learning modern Greek, they pretended, to please Dr. Bowstring and Colonel Chichester Stanley—another singing the *Marseillaise* and '*Saint Anton*' on Sunday evenings with the drawing-room lighted up, and people streaming out of the public-house round the corner to listen. No, there was no outrageous scheme in which the Tatts had not a finger. Lady Marcia declares that they went out dressed in men's clothes, to enjoy the Ludgate-hill riots, and that it was one of them who broke the great plate-glass window of Mr. Grollop, the Tory hosier. I believe it. I confess I should not like Clarinda Tatt to throw a stone at me: with that huge arm of hers!"

"But I thought they had a mother. What did she say to all this?"

"She connived at them, my dear—she enjoyed it all.—An infernal machine was put together in her back drawing-room (papa has proof positive—if not a model), to take over to France, and blow up the royal family while they were at mass. You should have heard her talk of tyrants. Well, the end was, that when the Back

Wigram Street plot *did* come to light, Mrs. Tatt's house was searched, and her papers had to be given up; and when the house was searched—they found some sort of an Italian or Dalmatian, who had been harboured there for months, only going out at night in hackney coaches, and with a false beard—the Duke, he called himself—Duke of . . . . . bless me! Lady Marcia may well tease me for my memory . . . . . a shocking person, my dear—too notorious to show himself openly—if he was a real duke, which we doubt—and who was obliged to be got off to America in a fog, down the river.—When this man was found, Porphyria Tatt went into fits;—screamed, and raised the neighbourhood. Mr. Shepherd was passing, love, and heard her screams!—She wanted to go off with him: for she declared that they had been married for six months. He declared *not*, it is understood; but it seems too true that they ought to have been married—I may say this as no gentlemen are by. Poor Porphyria! I thought highly of her once! And so the Tatts were obliged to let their house, and all their furniture, and leave England. They are living—some one said—

at Brussels, and have taken another name, just as if nothing had happened. Pray, love, be cautious: you are beautiful: you are rich: you are inexperienced—who can tell what these foreign people are? Pray, wait, and find out (papa will make any inquiries for you) before you let yourself be enthusiastic. Papa says he does not think Roccabella is a real name. We asked Lady Marcia, who has friends at every court in Europe. Lady Marcia is cautious, and will say nothing—which looks unfavourable. There is nothing we will not do to satisfy you as to whether he is or is not an impostor. We all take so much interest in you."

"An impostor!" exclaimed Rosamond—with indignation—half starting from her chair. Then she recollected herself, and added in a gentler voice: "Thank you; but I will trouble no one to make inquiries on the subject. Indeed, it is painful to me to have my name even mentioned, as you . . . as Mr. Bessell . . . . Pray, let nothing be done. I had fancied that one could please one's self in London, without being watched and commented upon!"

"O, my dear! liberty is Lady Marcia's

maxim—and mine, too; but papa says you have no idea what these refugees really are. Such instances he could tell you! When you come to dine with us on Sunday, he shall tell you instances. Of course, I could not think of comparing you with those strange, hardened Tatts; but it is dangerous, dear, believe me—it *is* dangerous. And so well aware of it am I, that I believe I throw a something into my manner—since none of those foreign gentlemen, I observe, are easy in my company. We are not a match for those Italians! What a distress would it be to all of us, if you . . . . We should never forgive ourselves. Wait till you hear papa's instances!"

It required all Rosamond's temper to carry her through the interview: but even Miss Grace Bessell's visits came to an end: and, after several times being convinced that she heard *that* Mr. Shepherd coming to call, and expressing herself as no less certain that his new house *must* mean a Mrs. Shepherd—supposing it possible that he could find such a lady—and after expecting to be asked to drive, and to remain the rest of the day, and expecting in vain—the large,

white, doleful-looking woman, at last took her leave.

"Mrs. Rick herself could not have been much more detestable," cried Rosamond, in a positive fever of impatience, after she was released. "To force herself on me in that audacious way! to presume to take me to task! Mr. Bessell's instances, indeed!" . . . . . Ah! the alarms and stale counsels of Miss Grace did as much for the Italian cause, with our heroine, as the wonderful speaking eyes, and impassioned manner, and interesting revelations of Signor Montegrone's deputy—whose story she longed to hear completed. And being, of all women under the seven stars, the least regardful of Mrs. Grundy, Rosamond there and then issued an order, that she was not henceforth at home to any one on the days when she took her Italian lessons.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SILVER BOX.

"Our villas on the lake of Como, madam," began Count Roccabella, when he was led by Rosamond to resume the tale which had interested her so much, "were connected by a plane-tree walk, where, in the old happy times, the young people of both families had often spent the whole day. I did not find that being away from them all—out of sight of Aurelia—did me any good. I became more and more restless and wretched—I began to fancy that there was something in Montegrone's letters which I could not understand. I knew that he must write to me under strict restraint, because the government was apt to be curious if people wrote too often, and too much at length; but I could not always make out his meaning, which became more and more obscure :—and he be-

gan to plead headaches as an excuse for stopping short. One letter was concluded by Camillo, who said that his brother was too languid to finish the despatch—because, since the great heats set in, Montegrone had become very languid. Camillo wrote, too, he said himself,—because *he* wanted, he said, very much to hold a private conversation with me—his letter ending with the sign which was in use among us, when any new member joined our party.—This decided me to go to Como, while they were all together there. Political matters, too, were just then ripening fast.

"But I could not bear to go to the villa Montegrone in broad daylight. The place was so deliciously gay and sunny!—I could not bear it! so I loitered about and fished on the lower part of the lake all the day—dressed in a rough dress. If I had been known to have come home suddenly, those priests would have wanted to discover why I came in the evening. I was under those plane-trees for the first time since every thing had been ended betwixt Aurelia and me.

"I thought that my heart would burst; for I seemed to know every leaf on every tree,

yet every thing was changed—*so* changed—grown so very solitary! Not a creature from either house was in the avenue—not a sound was to be heard: and in our old times you might be sure always in the evenings to hear a guitar, or people laughing there! It was nearly dusk, and the thickness of the leaves makes the place even darker than it ought to be. Somehow, impatient though I had been for weeks, I was afraid to announce myself—and loitered and delayed—unable to determine how I should do it, or for whom I should ask. I walked along the avenue, looking at the stars in the lake—*so* slowly. It was only when I got near the gate at the end, which leads into the Montegrone gardens, that I was aware of something pale, sitting still and alone upon the steps. It was Aurelia!

"I had not been expected, or she would not have been sitting there. When I came near her, she rose as she might have done if she had been startled by some stranger—my foot had told her nothing. When she heard my voice, and I got out a word or two, she cried out, as if she had been a helpless and terrified child—'O, go away!—O, pray go away!

What brings you here ? Why did you come back, Salvatore ?'—and she burst into a passion of tears, and flung herself into my arms.

"I told her, I suppose, that I could not live without seeing her again. I implored her to tell me that she had not forgotten me, that all was not quite over for ever between us !—I would wait, I recollect I said; I would make any sacrifice, I would do every thing she could ask—I would give her every thing she could dream of—I would even go to confession. I would satisfy her priest in any way she could point out; but part with her, give her up, I could not—it would kill me.

"'It *has* killed *me!*' was the poor creature's reply—turning her face full towards me, and, faint as the light was, I could still see that face—My God ! what a change—what a wreck !—what an utter wreck !—She had become thin and yellow: wrinkled like an old person. Her beautiful hair, of which we had been so proud, was wild and thick and neglected, as if it had never been dressed for weeks. Her eyes were sunk and hollow. She told me that she never slept properly now, 'and I shall not sleep, Salvatore,' she said in a tone of misery that I can hear

now—'I shall never sleep again, till I am safe out of the world—and in my convent, or in my grave.'

"You may judge if I could bear this. Ah! I now think that if I had been calmer—that if I could have soothed her, and pacified her, as I had done many a time when we were children—I might have perhaps recovered my hold over her, late as it was! But to see her, and to know that it was those priests who had made her what I saw her, destroyed my self-command. I do not recollect what I said, beyond that I raved—I upbraided—I entreated her, as if it had been for life and death! All this added only to her terror and agitation—It was for such a scene that her priest had prepared her. He had told her, too, how she was to resist it. Such anguish and horror were to be borne by her in no other way than one! I thought she would have died in my arms; but she broke loose from them,—and she fell on her knees and began to say her prayers, and when I spoke to her she only moaned, and muttered, and went on praying faster and more and more earnestly—in the twilight there, beside the lake.

"I was always an unreasonable, hot-headed fool! To see her there, a spiritless, soulless image, running over word after word, phrase after phrase, as if I had been some evil thing which she could charm away by her prayers—enraged me. I did not think what she *had* been! I could not for a moment! I thought of myself as my passions rose, and as she became more terrified—and more dogged—and crouched nearer and nearer to the ground, and muttered faster and faster—I turned for an instant away—perhaps I thought that I might stir something of the old truth—something of the old fondness in her, by seeming to go. When I looked back again, she was safe beyond passion—persuasion—safe beyond *her* own persuasions, if any yet spoke in that strange shut-up heart of hers. She was gone!

"Was it a dream that I had seen her—that I had held her in my arms—that I had felt her warm breath on my cheek, once again? But why should I take up your time with my history? It is nothing strange, after all. You will not wonder that on that night it was impossible for me to present myself at the villa Montegrone, to hold a political interview with Camillo. I passed the hours—I

sometimes think, that it must have been a year—upon the lake!

"What became of Aurelia—poor broken creature!—I subsequently learned from others.—It appears that she must have fled up to the villa, as though death was close behind her. You entered many of its rooms from the garden. Into one of these she sped—flung herself down upon a couch. When she faintly waked up—after how long a pause she knew not—she became aware of voices not far from her—in the next saloon—the voices of two people talking in the deep summer twilight—without knowing that she was lying there.

"They were the voices of the Marchesa Della Brianza and a man—the man a priest—the priest the Marchesa's confessor—not Aurelia's.

"'The cure is very slow,' said the priest, in a tone of discontent.—'Count Montegrone is very strong,' was the lady's reply, 'and his disease is hard to master. He becomes more and more restless and feverish every day—and sleeps less and less.'

"'And is Count Camillo often with him when he is awake? Suppose Count Camillo,

too, were to lose his sleep, daughter. Such things are apt to be epidemic in families of a certain temperament. Are you sure that you have followed my instructions implicitly? —fulfilled my directions?—administered my prescription to Montegrone every day?'

"'I have given what you prescribed in a glass of lemonade every day. The Count Montegrone has an objection, you know, to any thing like care, or medicine,' replied the Marchesa in the same odious glozing tone. 'He has no idea, dear lost man! how we are watching over him. And one would not make his wife jealous, father! What can I do next? I cannot bear to fancy my Camillo becoming infected. Our medicine must take effect. Shall I double the dose?'

"'No, child, no! on your obedience—no! If Count Montegrone were to sleep *too long* —if just at present Camillo were to have to act for him—or in his stead—we should be ruined! A week or two more of our treatment must suffice. But who would have thought that he could offer so much resistance? Have you enough of the powder to go on with? You know I shall leave for Milan to-morrow . . . 'Tis prudent I should.

Let me see: No? . . . . well, then, I will fill your little silver box quite full.'

"All that Aurelia further heard was a benediction—the priest blessing his pupil—and then feet departed, till they were quite out of hearing. She lay still: for a certain awe was over her—as if she had been talking to something of another world. Perhaps after she had stopped praying, the old affectionate Aurelia had revived in her a little. Too late! too late!

"Too late she knew it to be! As that night drew on, her agony and passion began to darken and to deepen. For she was then alone with her own heart. Many a time, she afterwards said, she thought that she *must* go to her brother there and then—*must* place herself at his disposal—*must* pray of him to call me back—*must* own that she was too weak to be as virtuous and devoted as those priests would have her to be! But the stern, stern superstition got hold of her again—fast—fast! She bethought her of the vows they had laid upon her,—she remembered what they had told her of my lost infidel state: she fell back into the snare—and writhed there—tortured—helpless—hopeless! That even-

ing, moreover, she met none of the family. Perhaps even had Camillo spoken to his little sister kindly—perhaps had her elder brother reasoned with her (as he formerly had tried to do), she might still have been saved. But it was not to be!

"The night went on: but brought no sleep for poor Aurelia!—She had not slept too much for many a month; but that night, the wretchedness of half hour after half hour, became more than she could endure. Think of this! she said that she absolutely prayed *that her reason might leave her*—that she might less clearly remember all that had happened. Then she began to put things together in a strange, diseased way—to advert to what the Marchesa had been saying to the *padre*.

"She believed, you will observe, in those priests! She had become used to their manner of watching over the members of her family quietly and secretly. Her poor, weak mind may have honestly conceived that the Marchesa and her confessor had really been discussing the health of her elder brother—that they really had wished to quiet his increased disturbance and irascibility by administering the narcotic, a double dose of which *must*

succeed. Why should not she get such help too? Why should not *she*, too, be put to sleep out of that wonderful silver box?—Why should she not manage it all for herself, as they were managing for her brother, secretly—and without any of them knowing any thing about it? She could—she *would*, there and then! Late as the hour was, she would watch the Marchesa—she would hide behind the curtains of her chamber—and when the woman was asleep, she would get possession of the charm. Such was the account (if account poor Aurelia's could be called) which she afterwards gave of what passed in her mind on that memorable night. At all events, it agreed with what befell. She succeeded in secreting herself in the room of the Marchesa Della Brianza, and in carrying off the silver box when that wicked woman was asleep. What prevented her from trying the virtue of its contents there and then, upon herself, was less clearly explained. Perhaps, so great had been her exhaustion that she slept without its aid; for certain it is, that she did sleep till late in the morning of the following day.

"It is certain, too, that shortly after poor

Aurelia rose, she received a visit from her own confessor—the man who had severed us, and who had ruined us both.—He may probably have heard of my having being seen in the neighbourhood, and accordingly came up to the palace to confirm his charge against possible repentance.—He found her quiet—those who saw them together said so—and reading. One or two of the servants, however, remembered that Aurelia had complained of feverish thirst, and had caused a caraffe of lemonade to be placed on her table. How the contents of that fatal silver box found their way into the flask, who can tell?—if she put them there—whether she remembered having put them there—or whether for herself alone? The casket, at all events, was afterwards found empty in her bosom: and the casket was denounced, not claimed, by *La* Brianza! Meanwhile, the morning was sultry, and the priest thirsty. When did ever a priest refuse to help himself to any luxury provided for his penitent? The two had a long and stormy interview. She, poor thing, it seems, *did* try to plead for her old lover—*did* allow her tyrant to see that he had not still utterly subjugated her. She let out, in-

cautiously, the facts—of my being in the neighbourhood, and that she had met me—had spoken with me! Her confessor threatened.

"'Ah!' cried she, passionately rising from the table at which they had been sitting. 'You threaten Salvatore! beware, father! beware!'—and Aurelia rose in a tumult, and left the room, to search, as she afterwards swore, for the Count Montegrone, her eldest brother, and to entreat him to intercede. Her spiritual director had been goading her more than she could bear—cowed, and subdued as she was.

"The Count Montegrone, however, was on the lake. He had gone down towards the Pliniana to meet me in a little creek, where a few olive and walnut trees made a screen thick enough to shelter a couple of such conspirators as we. When Aurelia came back—disappointed in her search for her elder brother, with the disturbed idea of appealing once again and for the last time to the humanity of her priest—he was gone. She asked for him: some one had seen him languidly slouching up one of the garden walks in the sunshine—but the caraffe of lemonade was empty.

Three hours afterwards, the priest was found by one of the gardeners lying, motionless, at the foot of the altar of the little chapel at which he had been used to say mass for the inhabitants of the palace, and of the village which was its dependency. They conceived him to be fast asleep. But it was more. He had drained the caraffe, into which the entire contents of the silver box had been showered. He was dead—dead of that remedy which the charity of the Marchesa Della Brianza had provided for the cure of the feverish Count Montegrone.

"You will spare my dwelling on what followed: The horror—the dismay—then the accusation of poor Aurelia—then her revelations of the discourse she had overheard betwixt their guest and their confessor—then the finding of the silver-box in her bosom—then the hideous medical examinations, by which it appeared that the system of Count Montegrone had been seriously tampered with—and his vital powers impaired by the perpetual administration of small doses of poison.

"This, too, the Austrian fiend charged upon Aurelia . . . as well as the premeditated mur-

der of her priest.—Well: they could do her no more harm: since, long before this stage of the affair had been reached, she was beyond the grasp of man to torture! Her mind was gone. It was necessary to place her under restraint, but not for long—God be thanked!—not for long! Three years ago she died: just before the movement began. . . . I do not know why," continued Count Roccabella, speaking suddenly in a tone of passion amounting almost to fury—"you should have wrung this history from me! But what do any of you women care what we men suffer; provided only you can have your curiosity and your love of excitement gratified! I hope you are contented."

What did Rosamond care? Her tears might have told any calmer man—tears which had she tried to restrain, but which she could not have restrained to save her life—tears such as no man (for in her way Rosamond was proud) had ever till then seen her shed. "I cannot help it; indeed I cannot!" at length she sobbed out. "It was not idle curiosity, I entreat you to believe. How could I know that I should hear so

sad a story as this—that I should hear your own story, when I asked you to tell me about Count Montegrone? I am sorry—more sorry than I can tell you, for the pain that I have given you; but I could not know it." Yet Rosamond would fain have still asked a question or two more; what (for instance) had become of Count Camillo? and what . . . . "I shall, perhaps, hear some other day." She thought within herself—what ailed her charity? . . . . . she was thinking of any of the persons who had figured in that dismal tragedy of wreck and ruin, far more than about him for whose sake she had asked to hear it—her poor, heavy, half-dead Italian master.

"Have we not time to read a little?" at length said she, making efforts to break the pause which followed; and to arrest her stormy guest in the rapid strides to and fro by which he was working off his passion. The Count Roccabella recovered himself—if recovery it could be called—to seize his pupil's hand and to kiss it—ere Rosamond could start from her chair—ere she had time even to ask herself if this was not beyond the usual mode of recognizing sym-

pathy among the impulsive southerns—the handsomest man north of Bologna was sitting close to her: and as if he, too, feared explanation—as if he, too, had a spell to break by force—was reading in his deep, musical voice, those most resonantly musical of all lyrics—the choruses to Manzoni's "Conte di Carmagnola."

It may be feared that Mr. Bessell's instances were that day—and for some days afterwards, also—utterly forgotten.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### SYMPATHY.

From this time forth the Italian readings of Rosamond became earnest, frequent, and secret. Every one of her household joined with alacrity in shutting out Miss Grace Bessell—with a mysterious and emphatic "*Mrs. Westwood is reading Italian, ma'am, and cannot be disturbed on no account.*" Nelkson watched on the stairs to see the visiter come, and to hear her sent away; and the comings were numerous in proportion to the dismissals. Even a note, to the effect that Lady Marcia had begged Miss G. B. to arrange preliminaries "for a course of readings with Mrs. Westwood's fascinating instructor, the Count Roccabella," failed to gain for the mournful virgin the desired opportunity of gratifying her curiosity. She began to think that she must absolutely descend from her pedestal—mitigate her pride of sex—and call upon Rosamond's neighbour, to ask

questions, and diffuse misgivings.—But Mr. Shepherd, whom she met in the street, was so rudely laconic, as even to overrule the perseverance of Miss Grace: and his audible remark, "*No proper female acquaintances!*" was not spoken in a tone to encourage her search after his sympathy.

Of these things our heroine was little aware. For these things she cared less. She was in a dream; and even had she known that she was dreaming—and that the chill, bewildering, moment of waking must arrive—the vision was too delicious to be resisted. All her life had Rosamond fancied some such occupation of her thoughts and affections as she had now found—some such mixture of passion, self-sacrifice, or high purpose, and eccentric duty—some such employment of her faculties, fit for a queen or a great general's wife, or for a sybil, or a priestess—as was now laid before her. The friend, the trusted and preferred friend of a devoted, and active, and hopeful Italian patriot—the *confidante* in whose presence he restrained no iota of his rage, before whom he was willing to weep, as even Italian men are seen weep rarely—the witness from whom not a mood,

not a thought, not a purpose were concealed;—to *be* all this (there was no playing of a part in Rosamond's case) was to fill her desires, to work out her hopes, to develop at once her passions, impulses, and endowments.—There was a homage in the Count Roccabella's entire trust; in his unhesitating abandonment, far deeper—far dearer, than that of the most exuberant compliments or personal flatteries. There was nothing personal in her readiness and sympathy. She thought little of her own youth, of her own beauty, of her own warm heart, of her own lavish munificence—she adverted sparingly to all that the Italian might be to *her:* what she was to him was the present sustaining, intoxicating enchantment. "My hours are not wasted now," Rosamond would say to herself, with emotion—"my propensities and feelings are not misunderstood. Perhaps even I, small and unknown though I be—may help, and take a part in noble deeds and great things!" And thus, with conviction no less than enthusiasm, did she fling herself, heart, soul, and spirit, into Italian affairs and Italian visions—never tired of listening, never slack of hoping—never grieved when

the speaker was feverish or unreasonable—never cautious in check of his extravagance. In after times, Rosamond often and again looked back towards these days as to that brief period of blissful delirium—distinct from love, though, perhaps, not far distant from it—which comes only once—even to the most abundantly generous and gifted—in his lifetime!

To protract this state of self-delusion, or of preparation—there were meetings upon a more neutral ground at which such exciting topics became exhausting. The two had much to say and to arrange, with regard to the good offices to be done to the Montegrones. Whether the Count had been poisoned or not—it became early evident to Rosamond, that the health of the unhappy gentleman was undermined beyond reparation. His moody and listless silence increased, and with it his indifference to either suffering or to succour. Though Count Roccabella would not delegate to any person else the right of assisting his old friend, Rosamond could do every thing for poor, scared Madame Montegrone: indulge her with carriage airings, fresh fruit, flowers, and small matters of taste-

ful dress, the presence of which (no matter whence derived) seemed to cheat the poor lady into some idea that her fortunes were not utterly ruined.—Conversation she had none: habituated as she had been all her life to the *ciarleria* of a small and frivolous circle—and beyond a rapture or two over some favourite opera, and a frequent outburst of distressing love and tenderness, the society of the Italian Countess should, by consistent right, have been as utterly barren and wearisome to our young widow as that of those Liverpool ladies, whose inanity had often driven her into such despair.—But in social preferences there is no consistency.—Rosamond's fancy was charmed: her heart was interested, and that prematurely gaunt, scarcely intelligible and fatiguing, companion, stood for society to her—even when the theme did not chance to be the devotion, the promise, the sorrows, the genius, or the manly beauty of "Salvatore;"—and Miss Grace Bessell might bridle a moan, and might again press upon our heroine the tragedy of the Tatts and "papa's instances," without either alarming Rosamond, or, for one instant, turning her aside from the

pleasure of her life, and the cultivation of her powers.

Thus went on the summer and the early autumn. In a few more weeks, the melancholy uniform of widowhood would be cast aside, and our heroine be again a free agent. But Rosamond hardly wished for the time of liberty. She had been for a while, and for the first time in her life, so happy. Unlike, too, the majority of human creatures, who confess little, in proportion as they crave much—she *knew* this to be her golden age. She resigned herself to the smooth, delicious flow of the current: and she did not, and would not see how fast she was careering onwards, towards the rapids, the rock-barrier, the cataract!

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A CHAPTER OF CORRESPONDENCE.

Our Martha was not made happy in the married state quite so soon as had been originally planned. Mrs. Marshall—the mother of Louis—slipped on the floor (my wife believes owing to the nervousness attendant on her receiving good news) and sprained her hip, so severely that she was sentenced to a sofa for many weeks—there to lie without putting a foot to the ground. Married, without Mrs. Marshall was present, neither her son nor our daughter would be; and the two bore their little disappointment better, I must say, than I could have endured such a thing when my Mrs. Bell was to be brought home.—Thus it chanced that their marriage, and the circumstances of their future settlement, excited more attention than any of us could have wished. Ironical

remarks were made by parents having daughters on hand:—and some bold people professed to believe that Grayhouse was a castle in air—the induction into which would never take place. At this, knowing better, we could laugh among ourselves. Still, publicity can never be pleasant to right-minded young persons:—and we *did* think Mrs. Marshall's hip long in getting strong—and that her doctor, like his patient, was the least in the world of an old woman. Autumn was now waning into winter. "Very soon," said my wife one day (who loved nothing so well as talking of our benefactress), as we sat round the table after our one o'clock dinner; "Very soon our good, kind Rosamond will be able to throw off those hideous weeds;—and, really, if ever woman might have been excused from wearing them a twelvemonth, she might!"

My wife was interrupted, almost ere she could end her speech, by such a knock as rarely favours our humble door in Halcyon Row. Then came in a scent of musk, and a rustling of silks; and, to my extreme surprise, and no small displeasure, there was ushered into the room, with much ceremonious

humility and mournfulness, the last woman in the world, except Mrs. Chidley, whom we desired to see in our house—no one other than Mrs. James Rick. That lady had long cast off her mourning greys and lavenders; and stood firm in a stout coral brown silk, fitting her figure tightly—a green bonnet, dark blue gloves, and violet boots.

My children, one and all, took a dislike to her looks, from her ill-fancied mixture of colours: and, with somewhat unmannerly haste, shuffled out of the room almost before she was in it—certainly ere her sighs, after having sat down, were over;—for she sighed several times before she could prevail upon herself to speak.—"I am glad," at length said Mrs. Rick, "to have found you alone, since I wish to make you acquainted with some family matters of extreme, I may say of painful, delicacy," . . . . and out bowled a text which had obviously been got ready for the occasion.

"O pray, then, ma'am," was my wife's reply, "excuse us!—We are hardly delicate people here:—plain and rough, I should say, and not fit to offer an opinion. And indeed, ma'am, if you will give me leave, I have

never found any delicacy arise from going round with one's family troubles. People are apt to forget—and to mention them in wrong places, and to wrong persons. I am sure my husband and myself, alike, should be sorry to be mixed up . . . or to know . . . It's better to be rude at once, than to be false a week hence, Mrs. Rick. Don't. Shall we have snow?"

My wife was no match for the serious lady. "How right you are, Mrs. Bell," was Mrs. Rick's dulcet answer—"how very right in your general principle! But you are interested in the matter I wish to consult you about, more than we" . . .

"How, pray, Mrs. Rick?" said my wife, whose antipathy, I could perceive, was kindling.

The answer was a plunge into a velvet bag, out of which Mrs. Rick drew a long crossed—nay, double-crossed—letter. She then sighed again, and begun to search up and down the network of pale writing—while, possibly, she was getting other texts ready.

"Mrs. Nagle's letters," said she, "are so copious—so full of matter . . Ah! this it is . . . . No, this letter is about the beautiful

state of mind in which the poor creature, executed on Monday last, met her end . . . Is it here?" . . . and our visiter began to hang over the hieroglyphic with a fond deliberation, which was wearisome rather than piquant.—We had never heard the name of Mrs. Nagle. What could there be in any letter of hers to concern us?

"O, this it is!" cried Mrs. Rick, untying her bonnet-strings, like one who is setting in for an interview. "Here it is—the news about our poor, dear, imprudent Rosamond, which you will be truly sorry to hear—if, indeed, you have not heard it already."

"News of Mrs. Westwood!" exclaimed my wife, hardening herself. "Nothing can Mrs. Westwood do that we shall be sorry to hear of. Is she ill, ma'am? Pray, don't break it to us (as they call it) if she is,"—and my wife's "*Pray*" was becoming so weighty, as evidently to make the serious lady more nervous than was her wont.

"I wish she *was* ill,"—replied Mrs. Rick, turning up her eyes with a terrible Christian meekness.

"Well, ma'am, that's what I call a sisterly wish," said my wife, with a toss in her chair,

which I understood. Perhaps a monitory look of mine prevented Mrs. Bell from saying more, and gave the serious lady opportunity to proceed.

"Bodily suffering I meant to say, my dear Mrs. Bell, may be cured; but if our beloved Rosamond should make an imprudent marriage, she may feel its effects till her dying day."

"An imprudent marriage!" exclaimed my wife, turning scarlet; "and who says she is going to make an imprudent marriage?—Liverpool gossip—umph!"

"I fear—I fear that there is more than Liverpool gossip in it," rejoined Mrs. Rick, and again had recourse to the letter, which she read aloud.

"'Is it your sister?' writes Mrs. Nagle; 'is it that Mrs. Westwood, in whose unprotected state we are all so deeply interested, who is going to marry one of those Italian refugees—a Count Bellarosa, or Bellabocca, or some such name?—He is said to be a Catholic, and not only so, but a Jesuit in disguise: and that she is about to embrace his fatal delusions.' Can there be any truth in this, dear Mrs. Bell? Have you heard

any thing of such a matter? Is there *nothing* that we can do?"

I saw by my wife's face that she believed the story. My heart sunk within me; for we all loved Rosamond dearly.

"I should say," continued Mrs. Rick, now in the full tide of malicious confidence, "that a day before Mrs. Nagle wrote to me—we had heard from Mr. Bessell—my sister Chidley and myself—in allusion to the subject. He had begged us to use our influence with dear Rosamond, to dissuade her from forming a connection so very questionable. It would make our dear brother turn in his grave, I verily think, if his widow were to marry a Papist. Do you know any thing about the matter, Mrs Bell? I took the advantage of Mrs. Trindle's invitation, to come over to the Hindoo Schools meeting, on purpose that we might consult together. My sister Chidley declines to act. She is apt to be a little warm, you know—but I cannot be easy. I have written to our dear Rosamond as temperate and affectionate a letter of remonstrance as was ever worded. I hope you will second me. Why, she will not be his legal wife in his own country, unless she

turn Papist too—and that is what Mrs. Trindle, and I perceive, in addition, Mrs. Nagle, expects she will do, at no very distant period."

"Ma'am, I should think," said my wife, breaking silence at last, in a voice sharp enough almost to break glass—"that Mrs. Westwood's relations would not be averse to Mrs. Westwood marrying again:—but quite otherwise. I have not a doubt but your letter would incite her to commit the folly, in place of deterring her, supposing there were any truth in such nonsense. But I don't believe a word of it! Rosamond marry a Jesuit! —she who hates stiff, smooth, silly, pious people, that make up a face!—as she hates poison. There's not a word of truth in it! And, ma'am, Mr. Bell says there are Jesuits in all religions: and I am pretty sure that Mr. Bell is right."

"Mr. Bessell warns us," persevered Mrs. Rick, who, like other clever and Christian women, was obtusely and meekly disregardful of every thing save the current of her own purposes—"that our dear Rosamond's magnificent fortune is in all probability a bait to this Italian. This consideration, too,

I set before her in my letter. Would it not be wise, think you, to make him acquainted with the real facts of the case? and to let him know that Rosamond loses her fortune in case she marries again:—and that none of us have the least idea of its disposition under such circumstances."

"*Ah!*". . . . said my wife to herself in that deep, long-protracted under tone of hers, which meant, I knew—"*Now we have it!*" "None of us, as you say, Mrs. Rick," repeated she in a tone of provoking sagacity, intended in her womanly fashion to torment her visiter—"Pray, write what you think proper, ma'am! If there be this man in the moon, who is about to come into your family, Mrs. Rick—you are the fittest person, surely, to state your impression, that, in the case of Mrs. Westwood's second marriage, yourself and party have expectations—unless indeed the whole sum is not bequeathed to the Hindoo Schools. I am sure that neither Mr. Bell nor myself would interfere in a matter so delicate—supposing it true; for we should think it the best kindness not to foment obstinacy by persecution."

"You put the duty very lucidly," was the

serious lady's sweet reply,—"if persecution watching over one another's good may be called."

"One another's good, or one another's goods, which? Mrs. Rick. You will excuse my being tart; but meddling is not to my taste."

I now began to get uneasy, feeling that Mrs. Bell ran some danger of becoming too merciless, even to that self-interested hypocrite. But my wife had taken the measure of her listener better than I.—The more she crested herself, the more humbly stooped Mrs. Rick. The sharper grew the one, the meeker became the other; so meek as absolutely to ask, after two moments more of this strange sitting—for a glass of wine and a crust of bread. She had not waited for Mrs. Trindle's luncheon, in her anxiety to find Mrs. Bell at home.

This disarmed my better half—who loves to see people eat and drink in our house—as much as she could be disarmed; accordingly I took advantage of the entrance of the eatables to make my exit:—being satisfied that no overt rudeness was now to be apprehended when once the tray was on the table. But I

thought, and thought all my way to the warehouse and back again, far more gravely than I liked, on this story about Rosamond. Her letters had of late been wild, brief, and hard to comprehend—containing a good deal concerning conflicts, sympathies, coming events, and tyrants. London appeared to have failed to satisfy her. She wrote contemptuously of the tone of female society there:—by which, I presume, she meant Miss Grace Bessell.

When I returned home in the evening, my wife and myself had a sorrowful comparing of notes, without paying much regard to Martha and Louis, who were playing at chess in the corner. Indeed, they had no right to be excluded from any deliberation of which their patron saint was the object. But the truth was, we were so intent on our apprehensions, and uncertainties, as to have forgotten their presence, till a somewhat triumphant "mate" from the gentleman, startled us.

"I know," said Martha rising,—"and you know that you cannot beat me. I have not been minding my game: but listening. This is an awkward report, mother, is it not,

about Rosamond? But she always had a heart ready for some foreign patriot or other; —dear, generous creature!"

"And Heaven grant," sighed I, "that he may not have found his way to her purse! What *would* become of her were she to marry some foreigner in difficulties, and if, out of her own utter unselfishness, she were to forget to acquaint him, until it was too late, of the disposition of her property?—I never knew woman less fit to be a poor woman than Rosamond, with her fairy-like notions of generosity!"

"And she has half-ruined herself," exclaimed my Martha; "half-ruined herself, already, in buying this living for us! Louis, if this should be true—if . . . I know what we must do—we must show that we are not ungrateful. We must lay by for Rosamond."

"My love, there will be our parish and its poor. Save a very moderate provision for you, I dare not lay by."

"Not from the living, of course," was my daughter's stout answer. "The income from the living is not ours, I know. Well, but we can take pupils—you must and I will. . . or, mind, I will never set foot in Grayhouse!"

I could have wept with pleasure to hear this. My child, too, had a touch of the good fairy in her nature. And, what was better, she always said, as was well known, less than she meant.—But what a destruction of their charming retreat—what a giving up of bridal ease and privacy! No wonder that poor Louis looked grave and disturbed! No wonder that he took leave for the night with a more than usually emphatic—"Let us hope that the story is not true, after all."

"I shall *pray* that it is not!" was the answer of his bride elect; "but if it *is*—we must do our part" . . . . the end of this high-hearted speech being stopped—how no one need wonder . . . . . for *I* kissed my Martha myself, and that heartily, when she returned into the parlour:—proud that our daughter was so unlike in her spirit to such a serious and professing Christian as Mrs. James Rick.

Should we write to this dear, ill-counselled Rosamond? now became a question betwixt Mrs. Bell and myself.—Should I go to her? was even a suggestion that rose. But my wife declares that my love of "going to every body" is only a love of gadding about;

—and, so recently had she forgiven me my stolen journey to Grayhouse, that the idea of my taking a solitary flight to London was doubly unpleasing. A day or two were lost in tolerably close deliberation as to what should be done—and a second visit from that nauseous woman was parried. About the third morning after Mrs. James Rick had disturbed us, a fresh and totally unexpected light was thrown upon Rosamond's love affairs, by a communication from a totally different quarter.

The hand in which the letter was written was springy and legibly accurate—the seal was a very small coat-of-arms; engraved in the highest style, though making little show. The contents were as complacent as the look of the text—but still the writing, as we all agreed, was that of a complacent gentleman.

"Sir," said the letter, addressing me, "I am induced to trouble you as a friend and family connection of Mrs. Westwood, for whom I have heard her express the highest value, and who enjoys, therefore, probably more of her confidence than any of her London acquaintance. Since the time when

I first met your charming relative, I have been satisfied that, beyond all the women I have ever seen, she is the person to make me happy; and closer and more frequent recent intercourse has only confirmed the conviction. From something, however, that passed the other evening, I have the idea that, in case of Mrs. Westwood contracting a second marriage, her own circumstances, as an independent woman, would materially change —in accordance with the provision of the will of her late husband. Can you give me, if it be not unpleasant to yourself, some notion of the amount of the dear lady's sacrifice? It is one of those points which I could not discuss with herself; but, before we come to final explanations, I am anxious for such information, since the state of my property, which, I am happy to say, is considerable and unencumbered, enables me to propose settlements equivalent to any income which would determine on the occasion. As I am writing to a man of business, no less than of delicacy, I enclose the address of my solicitors, who will satisfy you that I do not profess more than I can perform; and hoping that you will forgive the directness

of my inquiries, in favour of my earnestness, I remain, with sincere respect,—Your obedient, humble servant,

"GERVASE SHEPHERD."

The above was marked "*Private;*"—but I had read it aloud to my wife ere I adverted to the word above the date.

"Why, Paul—Paul, my love!" almost screamed my wife, in an ecstasy of surprise, "surely, surely this must be the true version of Mrs. Rick's story! Like her—the poisonous woman!"

I said I wished I could think so; for I could not imagine how even Mrs. Rick's eagerness for Rosamond's downfall could convert such an outspoken and considerate English gentleman into an Italian Jesuit. "And I fear," was my ending, "that this Mr. Shepherd is one of those very liberal, matter-of-fact persons, without imagination, who would use Rosamond much too well, and whom she could never bear!"

"Fear!" was the angry reply, "it is you men who are always fearing! We women know better; we have twice your courage, as well as twice your hopefulness!—I call

such delicate generosity, imagination of the very best kind, for my part; and, if I mistake not, Mrs. Rick will call it so too when I return her visit; for set her right I will, if it is only to see that *dove-with-the-olive-branch* mouth of hers that she makes up when she would so like to let loose."

"My dear, this is a private communication, which must on no account be divulged —not even to Martha and Louis."

"But divulge it to Mrs. Rick I must and will—anonymously or onymously. Dear Rosamond! see how she makes friends able and willing to take care of her wherever she goes! But can he have any idea, do you suppose, Paul, that it is as much as four thousand a-year?"

"I wish I knew whether she had any idea of the offer hanging over her! Did she ever mention the name of this gentleman in any of her letters?"

"Yes—no . . I am sure I don't recollect," replied my wife, uneasily;—who would rather have died than owned, that at that instant there *did* dawn on her mind some expressions of contumely, in Rosamond's earliest accounts of her London residence,

regarding a most intrusive person, whose advances, she said, had compelled her to leave the Beaufort Hotel. But Mrs. Bell, like a true woman, not only persuaded herself to forget this inconvenient truth—but went the further length of conjuring up particulars which she had heard about Mr. Shepherd somewhere—his goodness to his tenantry, his comely looks, his solid good sense, his sisters, or his cousins, (she was not quite certain,)—but sisters or cousins there were!

"A charming, united family, I am confident I recollect some one calling the Shepherds; and such a good, old, yeomanly, English name!—A Jesuit indeed—and so that's all you know, Mrs. Rick!"

It was in vain to moderate the good creature's assurance—which mounted to fever heat on the least contradiction. I confess I was far from participating in it: and answered Mr. Shepherd's inquiry duly and explicitly—with a heavy, heavy heart. His direct and over-liberal ways, I feared, argued a man whom Rosamond would never accept. Such a communication must have entirely put an end to all our fancies, had we entertained any, of remonstrating with Rosamond

about the rumoured foreign match. It was evident that no distant person was made acquainted with the real state of her affairs. But the letter added to our solicitude—until its import was driven from our mind, by yet another communication, more mystifying it seemed, in regard to Rosamond's real intentions, than either of the above.

"Honoured madam," thus wrote Nelkson, addressing my wife—"I address you in my lady's total ignorance of my communicating further than to inquire whether Mrs. Gibson's first floor has any hopes of being vacant, about the period of Miss Martha's nuptials, on which I beg my humble congratulations, and for a few weeks earlier. An answer at earliest convenience will oblige Mrs. Westwood—naming whether Mrs. Gibson objects to furnish French mattresses to her beds, no others being now laid down in the best London families. With regard to my mistress, honoured madam, being acquainted with your humble servant's affection for the former—I trust I may be pardoned for taking the liberty of mentioning, that a great service would be done to

her, by yourself or Mr. Bell (to whom I solicit my duty) putting her on her guard against *designing people* . . names, as too personal, being withheld out of delicacy and respect. Our condition of unprotection in London, makes great circumspection necessary—and many, alas! are willing to flatter widow ladies for the sake of *worldly advantages*, who would at once show themselves in their true colours, did the storms of fortune deprive us of our home comforts.—Personal provocations, honoured madam, I trust you will believe, have no share in my communication; since I should scorn to turn again, were people doubly aggravating—but respect for the lamb-like innocence of your honoured relative, and my beloved mistress, tends to make it impossible for me to witness her falling a prey to *insidious machinations*, without confiding my apprehensions to your superior discretion, being, honoured madam, —Yours, humbly and dutifully,

"ANNE NELKSON."

"I wish ladies' maids were never taught to spell more than words of two syllables," was my wife's irritable comment, as she

threw down the above letter. "What does the woman mean?—and French mattresses, forsooth, in Halcyon Row!—That's an invention of her own! I'll swear. Dear Rosamond does not care whether she sleeps on a mat or a mattress. And what she says about designing people and insidious machinations, is another—I'll assert! merely, I am convinced, brought in for the sake of the long words. But I *shall* be glad when the day is fixed, as dear Rosamond is really coming to the wedding!—I so long to see her!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### GREAT CONSPIRATORS.

THERE was a certain door filled with opaque glass, bordered with a stripe of red, blue, and yellow, in the dim background of a certain cigar shop, in a certain street not far from Golden Square, which said little to common customers beyond the fact, that it opened into a small, ill lit, and worse furnished parlour, where men who spoke no English, might be found sitting on most evenings of the week.—The parlour was indeed avoided by all choice spirits, and gay companions—on the account of "those dirty foreigners," who had little money to spend, and scarcely a domino box to entertain themselves withal. Yet, when its chronicles come to be written, it may figure among other haunts notable in modern European revolutions.

Nevertheless, it was not all pure patriotism,

and high expatriated rank, that collected there. Besides such sincere persons as Count Montegrone—day by day more and more leaden and dark in his complexion—and Count Roccabella, day by day more and more ardent in his certainty that the good time was coming—there were such beings as Monsieur Claudian. When was ever there a conspiracy without a M. Claudian? a man without right to bear his name—who might be a Pole, or an Alsatian, or a Bohemian, though he spoke French with the truest Parisian accent—who wore that metallically beardless chin and cheek, which tells of readiness to assume disguise at a moment's warning—a man who looked no one in the face, who gave ten cards with ten different addresses, to different persons—a man without family or friends; sometimes to be seen in public with young and beautiful women—a man who endured any amount of neglect, contradiction, and insult—who used every tone of appeal and of argument, from the finest irony to the most dogmatic blood-thirstiness—who was sometimes magnificently dressed and covered with jewels (real, perhaps), sometimes as penuriously

miserable in the livery he wore—a man whom every one disliked, yet every one consulted; the man who, at last, is sure to go the way of all former M. Claudians,—the way to the market at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its secret police offices!—He was rarely absent from the Holy Thursday club,—such was affectionately called the assembly which gathered once a week in Sylvester's inner divan.

There, too, came Mr. Sparding Montmorency, the English demagogue, with his frill, and his large diamond brooch, worn—because, said he, "those aristocrats had been used to abuse every one on the popular side, as though they did not know how to dress or behave themselves;" a speaker whose kindest words were in violent abuse of luxury and comfort, respectability and law, and at the superstitions of family affection. On looking at so small and watery complexioned a being, with his white eyelashes little darker than his white eyes, one might have fancied him a creature to be routed by a word or a frown from any scold outraged by his vauntings.—But the quietness and feminine lisp of the small man only made his talk all the more ferocious—talk as it

was, of fire and slaughter, without pity, or quarter, or discrimination. How he lived, or rather on whom—Mr. Sparding Montmorency never condescended to reveal—how should he? seeing that he held his head high, and that whenever a foreigner was mentioned, he would boast how one Englishman's every-day probity was worth the self-sacrifice of a whole town full of Italians, or a whole province of Spanish honour. Yet it was known that he had no fortune; since that had been swept away by the failure of his newspaper, "The Liberty Tree,"—that he had no home —no resources.

What was still more curious was, that in a haunt of this kind, and among such a crew, might be seen every now and then the fashionable *tenore* or *baritono* of the hour, flinging about his money freely—eating some coarse Italian dish with a greedy *gusto*, and giving a certain countenance and nationality to the gathering, which must have puzzled a stranger, had a stranger made his way into the midst of it. Nor were such apparitions wanting as English faces on the shoulders of English gentlemen and English statesmen who attended Sylvester's,

as they might have done a Mormon conventicle, or an execution, or a ball at Carrickfergus House—in search of excitement—or, as they might have said themselves, to give a proof of toleration and desire to learn. There was Mr. Trivett, hand and glove with many of the *propaganda*. He had chosen to have his brotherly-love pamphlet published by Mr. Marygold, the Chartist publisher.

The idea of any criminal being punished drove Mr. Trivett to write a letter to the *Times*, or a speech in the House, or a sonnet; and yet he had given a supper to the farmer in a smock-frock, who had officiated when Whiting was hanged at Stafford for the murder of his wife and four children; so that, to be logical, the sensations and consistencies of Mr. Trivett's life would not have been complete except he had dropped in, once or twice during the session, for a cigar at Sylvester's, ("conspiracy," said he, "was so nice!") On the evening, however, when we are there, Mr. Trivett was absent—so were Signor *Gorgheggio* and Signor *Spianato* (the one at Paris, the other on his way to the St. Petersburg opera). Then it is a known

truth that Conspiracy, like other professions, must go out of town in the months of September and October; so that the few brothers of freedom to be found in Sylvester's *sanctum* were of the meanest class—belonging to the persons generally neglected, if not purposely avoided—and as such, in proportion, gloomy and bitter.

The night was damp, and the darkness of the den was not cheered by the faces of three or four men muffled up in their cloaks, who were crouching over the sulky fire beneath the gas-light, half turned up.

"No Claudian again to-night?" began one speaker. "Umph!" was the sarcastic reply, "Claudian proves his love for his country by loving English country houses! Catch him in their charming London at this time of the year, so long as they will let him stay at Marbleton:—teaching French—as he pretends, and killing partridges—and older birds still! Claudian knows what he's about. There's a *vieille fille* at Marbleton, with some fifteen thousand pounds of her own . . . *Hein!* . . . If Claudian can get hold of Lady Marcia, we shall not be troubled with much more of his company here. They little

know—these English people—whom they have to do with!"

"Lady Marcia should know by this time, though," .... broke in another speaker, flinging away the end of his cigar; "and she does. But if she won't take an unknown friend's warning" .....

"*Bah!* how much has Claudian paid you, Hippolyte, to warn her?—as if any body ever minded an anonymous letter now-a-days, except to make them persevere. What have *you* got by 'em, I should like to know. They hurt nobody, they upset nobody; and it's my belief that, whether the postage is paid or whether it is not paid, people are so used to 'em that they won't read 'em half through." .....

"Or, if they do," observed No. 3, in a small philosophical voice, "they read them over to some police-officer . . . Claudian has paid Hippolyte, as you say, Bastien."

"Claudian be ——!" was Hippolyte's amiable comment. "Paid! I should like to see where our money is to come from for the next three weeks. Claudian has not paid any body a penny that I know of for these six months past."

"Well," said the smaller-voiced man, "he has done work if he has laid down no money, and that's more than some of us can say, Master Hippolyte! .... Twice backwards and twice forwards to Lausanne—in three weeks . . . and who paid for that?"

"Why, Mr. Trivett, you idiot!" replied the grumbler, with a sneer . . . "Claudian persuaded him that there was information to be got up about the Austrian police .... and so .... Who's outside?"

All three turned instantaneously:—and then dropped into silence. There was no one, however, in the cigar shop.

"Well, pay or not pay," said Bastien, resuming the conversation, after a stealthy *reconnoitre* through the glass door, and a noiseless return to the fire, "I'm for no more of your letter-writing, Hippolyte! Gregory's quite correct about that. If you hate a man, what does it do? why, only helps him, to be sure! Look at Montegrone! Have your letters hindered his getting one single lesson? though he's no more fit to teach Italian than this poker, and ugly enough to make every woman sick that looks at him."

A laugh was the answer . . . "Do you know how much Montegrone pays to the people who could stop the anonymous letters being written if they would? . . . . . Forty *francs* a month he laid down while the season went on; or, if not he, some one for him—that beauty Roccabella!"

"Then, in Heaven's name," screamed the other two, "how could you be such an idiot as to stop?"

Hippolyte gave another ugly laugh . . . . "Did I stop? Perhaps I've not got paid my last three months' allowance, that's all! . . . Perhaps our beautiful paymaster has had something else to do:—now that he is going to be married to this English widow with her million of money." . . .

"A million! . . . No, I'll never believe that Roccabella's woman has a million," cried the other two men almost in a breath. "Have you written to *her?*"

"Come, I do suppose you think me an idiot," said the other man sulkily, lighting a fresh cigar. "Let's let them get married first . . . . and then . . . . . but what's the good of explaining any thing to fellows such as you? . . . Well, as it seems there are not

enough of us here to make a meeting to-night, I'm off," . . . and, as he spoke, Hippolyte rose, flung his cloak over the lower part of his face, and, with a sullen nod, was out of the shop in an instant. By regulation, no one loitered, no one made noise, when departing from Sylvester's.

"What is he about now, Gregory?" said Bastien, after another moment of dead silence.

"Some work or other, be sure, that he won't share. That Hippolyte is a thorough scoundrel; I wonder whether he knows that the Princess has got back to Paris?"

"The Princess! the devil! . . . Roccabella's Princess?"

"That's it, Bastien . . . . . and got back to Paris, they say, with a free pardon, and a lot of money. . . . It's a mystery to me where all those Polish women manage to get their fortunes from! *She* cannot be a Russian spy, Gregory, can she?"

"How should *I* know?—She does her spying after young and handsome men, that's all:—and mad she was about Roccabella, till they broke off, and she went from Paris, and he came here; but let them only meet face

to face again—unless she has found something more to her liking in the mean time—and now that she has got her money back—why, I should like to see what this English widow of his will make of it!—There's some business to be done among the three, Bastien . . . . if it can be kept from Hippolyte. Can't he be got out of town? . . . Hush! is not that he coming back again?"

Both men started to their feet—there was nobody. They did not again settle into conversation or confidence, such as their's was;—and, as no more members dropped in, the fire went out, and the gas was turned down in Sylvester's back-room within ten minutes after the last words of the above edifying dialogue were spoken.

Alas, for sentiment! I must add, on the strength of after knowledge, that, betwixt Aurelia Montegrone and Rosamond Westwood, a Princess *had* intervened to influence the horoscope of the handsome and impassioned Count Roccabella.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SETTLEMENTS.

Pretty nearly about the same time that the trapdoor, which we have opened at Sylvester's, closed, Rosamond made her announcement good by arriving at Manchester—as she said on arriving, "to see good little Martha happily and respectably married." Why, when she said that, did she fling herself in tears on my wife's neck?

My wife is the most honest of women. "Rosamond, dear," said she, when the emotion had passed, "is it only to see Martha married that you have come down to Manchester? We have heard something about you !—Mrs. Rick has been over, dear, —and letters have come. Now, you know, Paul and I are homely people, and good for little—but we are grateful; and so, if you want any thing,—be it service—or some-

body to talk to—or somebody to stand by you, through fire and water . . . . What is it ?"

Out flashed Rosamond in a justifiable fit of anger against Mrs. Rick—"What right had that woman to meddle—what had she been writing ?—Lies ! calumnies, lowering insinuations !"

"Then it *is* Mr. Shepherd !" shouted my wife, in her loudest Lancashire voice, (and we have loud voices in Lancashire.) "O, I am so glad !—how glad I am it is not one of those Italians !"

"Mr. Shepherd ?" said Rosamond crimsoning. "Really . . . . One might have hoped that Mr. Shepherd had not tracked me out so far as to my friends' houses in Manchester."

"But he did, Rosamond—the dear man did," went on my wife—full of her own hopes —"he wrote to Paul, Mr. Shepherd did, merely to mention—a king could not have mentioned it more delicately—his idea, that in case . . . (You know, my dear what I allude to) and so to beg Paul—or somebody . . . or any thing . . to explain to you, that in admiring you . . . he was totally

apart from money . . . and that he was anxious (most anxious) to prove himself so, by making settlements equivalent to any loss you might sustain by a second marriage. O child ! you who have been so good to us (our good fairy, we call you), you can't—no, you *can't* guess—what this has been to us—Mr. Shepherd's letter. Real balm, I may truly call it."

Rosamond sate dumb—for she did not want to hurt my wife—especially considering their mutual relations ; but I saw by her face that all was a mistake, and premature on the part of Mrs. Bell ; and that our guest had something to tell, which she found a double difficulty in telling after such an assault of congratulations. Do women ever really consider women ? I answer, "*No*"— having watched the proceedings of my better half (who is still a good creature) with her daughters.

And so, nothing came of this talk, and nothing of my wife's explosion that night; for Rosamond only shrunk and shivered, and said " *Yes*," in all manner of inaccurate places ; and repeated over and over again, that she had merely come down to Manches-

ter to see Martha married—merely. I observed that, so often as Nelkson (her faithful maid) came in and out, she looked telegraphic and mysterious—and winked with a sort of "*God bless us* wink"—towards myself especially,—but this passed for the first evening without further explanation. There was a cloud—an unsettlement, a passing blight—an electrical influence among us—we felt; and my wife scolded our maid that night with a directness which has had no parallel before nor since. Perhaps it *was* the weather.

But, in the morning, dear Rosamond chose to come in very early—and chose to talk to me alone—and chose to tell me all . . . . "Somebody intended to follow her," she said—"who had been to her . . . who *was* . . . . . So good a man—so devoted a man . . . . . so handsome a man. And he is not poor, nothing of the kind! . . . a rich, generous, gracious nobleman! Cousin—the long and short is—I am going to marry Count Roccabella!"

"O, my dear!" I gasped out, and squeezed her hand. Thank God that I said nothing more disparaging, which, under circum-

stances, *was* a thing to be thankful for afterwards. I could not help going on. "But does he know—*does* he, Rosamond—that *if* you marry a second time, *how* you marry ?—Does he know all?"

Her face positively flamed in answer to my inquiry—as she cried "*Know*, cousin! .... Do you suppose I want to know what he may or may not have found out?—Do you fancy I doubt him? Do you imagine I am going to set myself up as one making any sacrifice?"

"I want to know—and I *must!*" was my reply—"because recollect, dear Rosamond, I am a man of business and your trustee."

"Without power to prevent," was her insolent repartee—for a woman in love is the boldest animal in repartee existing—"Without power to hinder my doing any thing that I please to do!—Now, my dear cousin, don't let us come to words. I love you and your family. You were kind to me when nobody else was," and here Rosamond cried much—"I shall never forget that .... but don't say a syllable against him! He was sure you would not like it—for I told him how kind you had

been!"—More tears at this—and, for aught I could see to the contrary, a hysteric coming.

"Is it settled, then,"—said I—"or do you want advice?"

"IT IS"— said she.—"What I want now is not advice, and not countenance, but assistance."

"And you know that he has any fortune?" said I, stiffening myself up into the man of business .... "May I seek into this? because, Rosamond, if he has not——No, ... we cannot let this marriage go on—and we will not let Martha's either!—It's all very well, but .... but"....

Her answer was—"He is coming down this evening. Talk to him." In similar encounters a man is always worsted by a woman.—I felt ill-assured, displeased, dismayed, and terrified as regarded Rosamond—but there she was—and *that* she would do—and what else could one say?

The evening brought Count Roccabella down to Manchester.

Why is it that Heaven gives to some men and women a charm apart from esteem, or love, or approval, or power of convincing?

Surely, as one among the many evidences of inequality on this side of the curtain, which claim another time and place of reckoning, for every immortal being who does not find his true measure here. It will not do to say, that I did not like—that I did not listen—I . . . . I was fascinated, and nothing short of it by that wonderful Count Roccabella. Had he chosen to change his mind there and then on the spot,—to jilt Rosamond, and to propose for Martha instead, (I have read of such fickleness in novels)—I am satisfied that I for one should have withstood him less furiously than a trustee and a father should or does—in novels.

"What did he say to you, my dear?" said Mrs. Bell, getting me out of the room for an instant into the passage; and with a face as frightened as if she had been about something wrong.

"I don't know, my love—I hardly know—that is—but he's a real gentleman."

"What a fool you are, Paul; why should he not?" was the answer. "But we must not both absent ourselves! I wish—that I do—that Martha had not seen him till she was married."

Our little daughter, however, stout and steady in her own happy prospects, was the soberest of the three, so far as our splendid-looking guest's fascinations were concerned. When Mrs. Bell and I returned, he was sitting between her and Rosamond, talking to the girl about "Grouse," as he called Grayhouse,—and the privileges which Protestant clergymen enjoy of being able to marry,—and admiring her wonderful knitting, as so tall an Englishman would think it frivolous to do .... And though Martha smiled and was amused, she never laid by, what our children used to call "her judging face," and was more occupied, I think, in watching Rosamond than in examining Rosamond's choice.

I liked, however, to hear the handsome and happy Italian suddenly say—stopping at the outset of some story about Signor Spianato's answer to the Austrian ambassador—"But, Mr. Bell, my dear, when have you some leisure—for some a—conversation? .... To-morrow, my dear—will you? but you will do what you think with me—for business is not my strong point."

"O, no business to-night, cousin," cried

Rosamond, "I had enough of it, Salvatore, from Mr. Bessell, the last few days I was in London, to hate the very name of it. Go on with the story of Signor Spianato and the Austrian ambassadress! What was his answer to her?"

"Ah!" said the Count, changing in a second, as no Englishman could have done. "This is not a long story—When Spianato came to London at first, Princess Djiazy, Austrian ambassadress—went about telling every where that he never enter their doors—and why? because Spianato was a liberal. She thought she could prevent him—and he knew it. *Che importa!* When a man can sing as Spianato does, and is of such good manner. Well, before the first six weeks were out, no . . . never was any thing like the fashion of that good Spianato! He dine here—he must sup there. Duchess of Brownshire—she always send her own carriage to wait for Spianato, and travel him home from opera (Duchess once in carriage herself . . . but that may be tale). Well, what happens? Princess Djiazy wish to give grand party to King and Queen—and Queen says to Princess, the week before,

'I'm dying to hear Spianato in private sing.'—Come, so she must—Princess must make up to the Italian singer too By Jove! —very well!—They thought Spianato would not go her house . . . *Bah!* He laughed at all that! *Che importa!* 'Go, why not? I sing,' he said, 'and she pay.' Spianato keep Princess waiting a week, six, seven, ten days—ere he let her be sure he go to sing at her party! O you should see, when she salute him, the bow he made to her.—Every one laugh but Princess;—for she had been too saucy, and boast too much—and there she was, you see! So she began all manner of civil, and she tell Spianato how she cry at 'Otello,' and she say, '*Enchanté d'entendre, Monsieur, que vous avez fait une si bonne affaire ici.*' '*Affaire, madame?*' was his answer, '*Les affaires sont pour les diplomates; n'est ce pas? moi je fais la musique.*' She say very little more to Spianato that night,—poor Princess did."

The sweet face, the animated manner, the gay little gesticulations of the speaker, were more to us than the anecdote will be to others. But it was anxious work to see how intensely Rosamond was interested in

the narrator, no matter whether he had told sense or nonsense.

"Paul!" said Mrs. Bell to me, when the door was shut—Rosamond gone to her lodgings—and her betrothed to some horrible paltry inn or other—we had nothing else then in Manchester!—"Paul, if that man takes that woman to Italy, I should not wonder if she loses her senses."

"But he cannot take her to Italy," was my practical answer. "He cannot go there himself, you know, being a refugee!"

"But I *would*," was my wife's reply. "I would go there if I was in her case—I *would make him take me!*—Poor dear sweet Rosamond!"

I went early on the following morning to Count Roccabella, and though I found him in that curious dress which foreigners select to wear before they go out and pay visits—a long bed-gown, it seemed to me—I was more struck with his grand looks, and his good manner, even than I had been the evening before, when I had seen him neatly arranged and trying to please women. In truth, there seemed no pettiness, nor reserve about him; on the contrary, a full gracious

kindliness, ready to expand itself over all whom he adopted. Dear Rosamond might have painted us—a homely Lancashire couple—as angels, to judge from his manner. Or did he fancy that any thing was to be gained by pleasing us? Such a notion did cross my mind—but I drove it out, with a "Fie!" We English people, in country places, are apt to be too suspicious.

It was Count Roccabella's wish to explain to me, that under the circumstances of exile, in which he was about to be married, and belonging as he did to a family some of whom held opinions entirely different to his own—it was impossible for him to make any settlement on my connection. "It sounds strange—it must seem so to you, because every one knows that I have money to spend and money to spare; but my money, let me explain, is only income, which comes to me from some of my family who are too honourable to cheat me of what I should have, were I at home on my own lake; and nothing that I could say or do would find any among them willing to continue remitting a sou to any foreign widow of mine, supposing . . . . . So that it is indispen-

sable that every penny of Mrs. Westwood's fortune" . . . . . .

A start from me cut him short; for, indeed, had I been shot, I could have been hardly more astounded. "Rosamond's fortune!" I echoed—"Rosamond's fortune!" I repeated, to gain a little composure—for then, too, it leaped into my mind like a thunderbolt, that every sixpence of Rosamond's ready money must have been disposed of, and more —plate, jewels, perhaps—in the purchase of the living of Grayhouse, for our Louis and Martha!

"Rosamond's fortune," I stammered out, —the third time:—"Has no one told you that Rosamond's fortune goes from her if she makes a second marriage?"

He, too, looked as if a shot had struck him—but his amazement took the form of instant stillness. His face became half a dozen shades more intense in its bronze than it had been a second before—"No one has told me this," was his answer—and like me, anxious to gain a moment, perhaps, he repeated, "No one—May I ask?" . . . . and he then curbed himself suddenly—his face darkening with a frown, which haunted me

for many a day afterwards—"No: what need is there to ask? . . . . as *you* did not do me the honour of acquainting me with this earlier.—You are Mrs. Westwood's trustee; are you not, Mr. Bell?"

"I am, sir;—but give me leave to ask why I should have acquainted you with any affairs regarding Mrs. Westwood's fortune earlier? You cannot suppose that any of us could dream of wishing to entrap any one to marry her."

"No, Mr. Bell!—but to entrap her to marry me—that is another question. She is in love with me now! I have tried to make her in love with me: and not in vain.—She will go on now.—Whatever you say or do she will go on!—Heaven knows, if, knowing as much as I do now—and being a man of honour—I should have tried to engage her affections, and engage them to her ruin!—It . . . . it . . . . Sir, I cannot think well of either your prudence or your care of Rosamond, in the part of concealment you have acted."

"Part of concealment!" I exclaimed, almost as excited as he had been; "do you suppose, sir, that Mrs. Bell and myself have

been acting parts? What pleasure could it give us?—what advantage—if you have so poor an idea of us, as to think we wish to take advantage of a defenceless woman—our relation?"

"Who succeeds to the money?" asked the Count, with an abruptness which in an Englishman would have been insult: "You, not?"

"I do not know," was my reply—"It is left in trust to Mr. Oliphant and myself, under sealed instructions, which we are not to open until Mrs. Westwood's marriage with any one else shall have taken place.—I shall require that you convince yourself of the fact; since I do not expect you to believe my assertion, that the disposition is as unpleasant as it was unexpected. Why did you not make due inquiries of Rosamond, or of myself? It is late, now, to change your mind—but it is unjust to lay on us the blame of a difficulty which has been caused by your own want of caution. But indeed, —and believe me, sir,—the affair had better go no further. Better a little suffering now than much hereafter."

He sate stiller for five minutes than I sus-

pect was his wont—looking gloomy, and not altogether convinced, and I fancied, (knowing him, as I did, so imperfectly) undecided. Then he began to dress himself, to tear on his clothes, I should say,—almost striding over me in his haste, and muttering vehemently to himself in Italian.—"Do let me," said I—seeing that no answer would come—"persuade you to wait, at least, till you have well considered what must be so disagreeable a surprise to you. You may be bringing poverty and distress on two persons: yourself, by displeasing your family, and her, by enticing her into a sacrifice for which you can offer her no compensation."

He paid no attention to a single word I said—not, apparently, so much because he was keeping down impatience—but because, I verily believe, he did not hear me, so full was he of the storm of his own purposes. It was a wonder how he got into his clothes; but he was dressed in a second, and out of the room, and out of the inn, and out of the street, before I could think thrice what I had best say and do next.

Heaven forgive me! but the vulgar old English suspicion of foreign adventurers came

back to me, and came back—which was natural—like a comfort. Supposing he was off for good and all, being disappointed in the spoil he had expected! When I hinted this to my wife, as we sat at breakfast, before I went across to see what could be done for Rosamond, Mrs. Bell brandished the teapot with such a provoked face, that I thought she was going to smash it at my head. Her hand was stayed by a note from Rosamond, expressive of a desire to pass the day alone —"She had business to transact," it said, "and business, moreover, in which no one, not even Martha, her favourite, could help her."

In the evening she walked in, taller, prouder, more brilliant than ever. The Count Roccabella, she said, had gone to town to make immediate preparations for their marriage. "It is to be here, of course," said she; "and you will give me away, of course, Cousin Bell. One, and only one condition I have made, that it is to be on Martha's wedding-day. Was I, or was I not right? You see that it is not for my money that he takes me!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LEAVE-TAKINGS.

We often refer to the time which intervened betwixt Count Roccabella's departure and Rosamond's wedding, as to one of the most trying periods we have ever passed through—days of indecision as to whether it was possible to reconcile discordant matters. I kept saying to myself that "something should be done;" but what could any one do with Rosamond? She seemed to be more in love than any woman I had ever set eyes on—to be writing every hour to the Italian, not, of course, communicating a word of what she wrote, or what he answered. Her house in Park Street was given up—that we knew; and we knew, too, that it was their intention to proceed to the Continent, making only a brief stay in London, immediately after the wedding. "Business—important

business," Rosamond said, with a flashing eye, "called him abroad, and would detain him in London till the very day before the ceremony; and since you do not like him," she added, with a convulsive laugh, "it is I, and I only, who shall suffer by his absence. Never mind, I can wait,—when such as he have had to wait."—This was all that Rosamond confided to us. Some hurried bridal preparations were set a-going; for on communicating with Mr. Bessell, it appeared that some hundreds still remained to Rosamond's credit. But we implied that the bride was preparing for retrenchment. We hoped that this did not mean separation of herself from all who had cared for her in the former days of her wedlock and widowhood; but there was cause for some apprehension.

"It would make a Paterson swear," said Mrs. Nelkson, one evening suddenly presenting herself within the door of the parlour where my wife and I were sitting, "to think of Mrs. Westwood selecting to dispense with my services, at this time of all times. It is all very well for her to tell me that I don't know the languages—and that I shall be only a charge to her, in foreign countries:

as if I had not shown resources when we were two lonely creatures up there together, in London, at a period when none of those showy, fine Italians had entered the scene! I would ask you, Mrs. Bell, if you please, is it becoming that I should part from her, now—when she is going to pass into dubious hands belonging to a party of another religion? Not but that I daresay she will turn a Catholic too—just as those Winterbottoms did, one and all."

"O, I hope there is some mistake," said my wife, "and that she will not really send away an attached and valuable servant like yourself, Mrs. Nelkson!"

"That's just what Mr. Blosse said at first when I communicated it to him, madam—though Mr. Blosse now declares that he is likely to be the gainer by the step,—not that I lay stress on persons' male flatteries,—since I told him that he might have waited long for me, and opened his establishment by himself, if my lady had been reasonable. Poor thing! she's as wilful as a child, born or unborn; generous as the day—but careless. Why, ma'am, she never knows where to find the smallest thing; and as for prudence

—the only time I ever recollect her turning a key for herself was the day she locked up her new bonnet in the plate closet, and defied me to prove it had ever been sent home from Madame Anatole's,—and then wrote off post haste for another; and it was not till the day of their next dinner-party, when the silver dishes were in request, and then, lo and behold! out came the bonnet—a pea-green silk it was, with acacia branches.—What's she to do, if she goes abroad without me, but to lose every object of value she possesses in the world, and to be pillaged worse than Mrs. Pendragon was, when the banditti stripped her of all her possessions, and left her tied to a tree, without garments, and covered with an old horse cloth ? Somewhere in Italy, that was too ! What is my mistress to do ? "

What, indeed ? occurred to us both.

" If I had been greedy, like Mrs. Botting's Eliza," continued the voluble woman, warming as she went on—" If I had been disrespectful—or over-curious,—but no, caution actuated me from first to last. Mr. Shepherd did his utmost (a next-door neighbour of ours in town, sir) to conciliate my good

word—not that any thing mean was tried by him; I must say, on the contrary, all was over-board and graceful. But when I saw the current setting against Mr. Shepherd—did I ever remonstrate a word? Not I—I discountenanced him vigorously; I mentioned to him that I was not a lady's maid such as one hears of in plays, who blows hot or cold in obedience to the dictates of gold! I did not conceal that he had my good wishes—but hearts, I reminded him, were not to be controlled—and that his must be nipped in the bud. Yet present after present might I have had, if I would only have sailed under more propitious colours, and lured him along! Well, after all this to be dismissed! No, Mrs. Bell, flesh and blood can't acquiesce, when I love my lady, as I do . . . and when I see her floating to the edge of the precipice—who's to stand by her then?"

"I fear," said I, really disturbed at what we heard—"that if Mrs. Westwood has decided on letting you go from her, there would be no use in our interfering."

"Indeed, sir, I concede to that—and it is more to ease my mind I have taken this

liberty than from self-interested hopes—Pray Heaven that it lasts! O, sir—I hope this new gentleman will be kind to my lady!"

"Have you any reason to suspect the contrary?" asked Mrs. Bell.

"Nothing definite nor to lay hold of, ma'am:—Nothing my lady would bear to hear me whisper: but friends of mine, who have been abroad, ma'am, have met Count Roccabella, and in other circumstances: and I fear he has always been used to pay court to the ladies, and has not received as many 'noes' as would have been prudent on the part of some.—But Heaven forbid I should make mischief! There's enough as it is, without my finger in the pie. No: what I wanted to intercede you to do, Mrs. Bell, and Mr. Bell too, is this,—arguing is of no good, and promising is of no good—and indeed now, having given my word to Mr. Blosse, I could hardly recede without inconsistency—and I know that for the present my lady would rather be without me: but do tell her from me, that if prospects were to change, and clouds to descend, she has only to hold up a finger, and I will be

at her beck and call at any moment, if it was as distant as Tartary;—and that I expressly stated as much to Mr. Blosse in pen and ink before I acceded to crown his wishes."

"Nelkson," said I, "you are a good creature; but I hope with all my heart she will never need you on those terms. So you are going to be established yourself: where, pray?"

"The library, sir, in Pewterer's Passage, near this, being vacated, Mr. Blosse, to whom service has never been congenial, is entering on it at Lady-day. We do not build high, but trust it may suffice us—works of fiction principally, with books for children and the use of schools. I shall like, sir, to be near you; for I shall thus take the liberty to hear from time to time how my lady is going on. Indeed, I would not have quitted her for any change of condition, were it thrice as advantageous, had not such been her own mandate."

There was some comfort in knowing that we could have so good a creature, and so devoted a follower of Rosamond's, near us, though her language, as my wife expressed

it, was "affectation's self;"—but we felt the entire scheme to be somewhat dismal and full of uncertainty, so far as concerned our relative. The day after this oration of Nelkson's, Mrs. Bell tried to approach Rosamond on the subject, and to remonstrate. Nothing, however, was to be done with her. "Nelkson," she said, "had been many years engaged to marry Mr. Blosse, and she could no longer think herself justified in interposing her own convenience betwixt that good woman and a quiet English home. Fancy Nelkson," she said, "roughing it in Italy . . . or if . . . . The long and the short is, that I am entering on a new life to which she cannot belong, and in which she would but distress me. Ah! you think I can do nothing for myself. You may live to see! I mean to work as hard as the poorest woman."

"Well, darling, if you are set on hard work," was my good woman's reply—"but meanwhile, in one thing I will have my own way.—Marry from any lodging you shall not. You shall go from under our roof, (I know it's a poor one!) but here you must come and stay the last days. O

Rosamond!—something tells me you will never belong to the old places or the old friends again." . . . .

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Bell! perhaps, if you had given me Martha for a companion, I should never have taken a husband," was the answer in a reckless tone, which we could neither like nor understand. "Yes, I shall like to come and be married from your house—as I have no mother."

"Other people *have* mothers," said Mrs. Bell to me when we were alone at night. I knew what my wife meant, and what she expected—and all that we expected happened, nay, more.—Great fractiousness on the part of the mother of Louis, Mrs. Marshall, who, having come out again after many months of confinement, thought she had right to be consulted and humoured in the arrangements for her son's wedding-day. She had never been sufficiently impressed with Rosamond's unexpected generosity: so great was her opinion of Louis and his talents, that it seemed only natural that all manner of livings were to drop into his mouth. Having, we imagine, made up her mind to pay a perpetual visit at Grayhouse, it was most

distasteful to her to hear Louis had resolved to take pupils from the first ; and many tart allusions were thrown out by her, which used to make my wife twitch her face and pretend not to hear, in order that she might avoid answering.—Then, Mrs. Marshall had set her heart on an old-fashioned sociable wedding for Louis and Martha. She had promised Mrs. Brudge and Mr. and Mrs. Spindleton, and the three Miss le Grands to be present: and before Rosamond had come down to Manchester, she had consulted my wife about the breakfast, the dinner, and the supper. "It was the only great occasion of her life since she had been married herself," she would say, "and now, here it was going to be taken out of her mouth!—Why could not Mrs. Westwood and the foreigner be married in their own Romish way—and on a day of their own, instead of spoiling every thing? She knew she should not utter a word before such grand people ; and if she was not to be comfortable, she would rather not ask her old friends, to make them sit on thorns too.—She would not."

We joined eagerly in Mrs. Marshall's proposal to defer all the jovial doings, in

which her neighbours were to take part: but, unless Louis had helped us, the peace must, I think, have been broken. I saw, with pleasure, that our little girl was already exercising a generous influence over him: and prudently, too,—for when the boy, aware that Count Roccabella had been disposed to regard us with suspicion, had talked of declining to enter on his living—"What avail would that be now?" was Martha's wise answer: "but, Louis, we must do the best we can to lay by for *her!* We may have a home for her one day, and if we thwart her too much now she will go away, and never let us hear if she falls into any trouble."—Martha it was, further, who contrived for the appeasing of her querulous mother-in-law elect, the prospect of a week of Christmas feastings in Halcyon Row—when, as she said, "they could make all Mrs. Marshall's old friends much more comfortable than on any wedding-day."

The days rubbed on (to use my wife's phrase) rather as if we were in the midst of a lawsuit than on the eve of two weddings; such business as there was to be done was got through; though one important matter

must be still left till the last moment—the opening of the sealed instructions left by Mr. Westwood—which could not take place till after Rosamond's second marriage. This added another perplexing incident to those of the wedding-day; though by a communication from Mr. Oliphant, my co-trustee, I was largely relieved from an apprehension which had haunted me.—That Rosamond's wicked sisters-in-law would not profit by her rashness, I had long been persuaded; but it was a further comfort to be assured, that every penny was so simply apportioned, and so strictly tied up, as to preclude the possibility of any jobbing, or personal profit, direct or indirect, on our own parts. I could have carried off the entire four-thousand a-year in triumph from those two Liverpool women, spent it before their faces, with all my very heart of hearts—but I could hardly have met Count Roccabella, if it had been possible for *him* to suspect that we were gaining by his wife's loss.

The blackest, bitterest winter weather it was that I recollect ever in Manchester—"weather," as Nelkson said, with a sob to my wife, two days before the event, "uncongenial

enough to cast a chill over the most auspicious royal nuptials—weather, however, not bitter enough to keep birds of prey secure in their own haunts, ma'am.—Don't you think, ma'am," continued she, "it will be better to prepare my lady for parties in the church, who may come there expressly to see her humiliated according to the dictates of their own low minds.—May my married name be Cross, and not commence with a B when I change my condition,—if I did not behold, alighting from a coach to-day, the carrion-crow and the rook, as I used to call them—Chidley, Rick, & Co.—I pointed them out to Mr. Blosse. 'Tis no good errand that brings *such* over to Manchester, or that makes them assume the bare semblance of harmony for a passing hour. Is there no means, ma'am, think you, of desiring the sexton to administrate against intrusion, if they do show their false faces at the church door on Tuesday morning?"

"The best thing is to say nothing," was my wife's prudent answer. "They may be here by accident: they may not know the right place, or the right time, exactly; any how, we shall get through somehow, Nelkson."

I thought, however, that it might be as well secretly to prepare Rosamond for any trial to her nerves that those intolerable women might occasion—did they appear. But I had no opportunity till the next afternoon, when, chancing to find her alone—for she was now our guest in Halcyon Row—I attempted to lead her gently towards the subject. It was useless. She had letters from London on her knee—the last she was to receive ere the beloved of her heart and fancy arrived—and she was too much absorbed and excited by their contents to have a second's attention for any thing less dear.

"Late to night, Salvatore will be," said she, "too late, he says, to come here; some business of the highest importance has detained him in town. Had I known it earlier, I would have arranged to go up! I do so hate giving the very least trouble to any one!"

"O come, child!" said I, forcing a gaiety I did not feel—"when one is going to be married, one may make up one's mind to give trouble, I do hope and trust—or when, if not then?—What friend is the Count going to bring down with him?—the Signor Montegrone, I have heard you speak of?"

"What, that poor invalid? He would die of a journey in such horrible English weather. I declare, I have never looked—I was so much interested in other things. O! a M. Claudian—Claudian Valpiquet, is the name. French, I fancy—I have never heard Salvatore mention him—to be sure, he never talked to me about any thing but Italians. I thought it would have been one of his countrymen—but just now, no doubt, they are better engaged . . . I can't see, that among my own friends, as I am here—there was any need to trouble any one."

"Upon my word, to hear you talk, Rosamond, there might be no need for you to be married at all! Do, darling, be a little less wild! . . . . I wanted to tell you" . . . .

"But I don't want to hear you, cousin! . . . Come now, I am going away—who knows if I may ever come back again! . . . and I won't hear a single hard word about any body, or any thing, and I won't be scolded! . . . . It is enough to have the trial of that poor maid of mine, with her doleful face, just as if she was not going to make the match on which she had set her heart,

—and winking and hinting as she does ! Now, don't say a single word, or I will lock you all out, every one of you, and go to church by myself ! Now, dear cousin Paul, let me finish my letter in peace ! You know, wilful I was, and wilful I will be !—now go ; there's a dear good soul."

I was scarcely out of the room when I heard her singing aloud and wildly (have I ever said that Rosamond had a magnificent natural voice ?) some Italian carol or chaunt, from no opera that either I or any of our children could remember.

Who need be told the sort of message, or token, or understanding which had arrived at our guest ?—When we met at the supper table, she was triumphing, I could see, in some secret. We all thought that she had never been seen to look so beautiful. She seemed to have time for every one, and thought for every thing, and an ear every where—thanked us again and again, (more than thrice enough, poor thing !) for all the pains we had bestowed on her—and did all that woman's sophistry could do, to prove that this match was not passionate, but prudent also. "The best thing for me that could

have happened—which has saved me from becoming an idle fine lady. That capital creature, who is leaving me, was spoiling me to such a degree that in six months more I should have thought it a hardship to open my eyes for myself. What a treat it will be to try to live on as little as possible! You laugh, cousin, but I never did enjoy having my own way—and being treated like a doll, good only to dress in fine clothes. And you shall all come to see us in Italy; there is room for fifty guests at a time in the palace on the lake, and it will be before two years are out . . . . . You will see! you will see! —We have had such a fight, Salvatore and I,"—she continued,—"about some of the family trinkets,—which he insisted on my having. I told him that a beggar who married an exile had no business with sapphires; and that they should go the way of all my first jewellery—Yes! I am not going to be spoiled!"

"But, Rosamond," said Martha,—"I thought you enjoyed not having your own way!—Supposing the Count choose to spoil you!—It seems to me the next thing to choosing to be a nun, in order that you may

be kept in order—your fancy of giving up your own way" . . .

"Nonsense! you mite!" was the gay answer. "You want to be spoiled, that is obvious—and I hope Louis will do it to your heart's content—as a clergyman should!"

"You shall see when you come to Grayhouse—for come to Grayhouse you will—it is your own house, Rosamond, you know—and there is your own room already there before we go to Como—I have a presentiment—Suppose" . . . . .

"Let me hear no supposes, Martha . . . They bring bad luck—Talking of troubles makes them come! We will have no trouble! —I am determined—All *shall* go well!"

"Another giving-up of your own way!" replied my little daughter,—whose freedom in intercourse had been brightened as well as emboldened by her happy prospects.—"Only this—dear cousin Rosamond—there is your room at Grayhouse—and come what may—if it should chance that you want Louis or me—why, dear, we must disappoint you—and you *must* have your own way! Nothing but sickness or death shall prevent us being with you—if need be."

There was an earnestness in this which took the laugh out of all of us :—as though the pledge of helpfulness, given with a full heart, implied precision that help would be needed. After such a speech we could not fall back on trifles or light topics any more —and it seemed a signal for our breaking up. How many pairs of wakeful eyes were there under my roof that night ?

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### "TURNED OFF."

HONEST people will sleep at last, whatever the cares of the past day may have been—whatever the trouble of the coming day is like to be. In nothing is night more blessed than as a marker of periods; a shadow—nay, a substance rather—by whose aid we notch off another fragment from the embroiled weeks which stand betwixt us and deliverance. Even when sleep does not come, the darkness, the retreat—let them be ever so crowded with phantasms, longings, reproaches, with the burning sense of injustice—the yearning after those who will return to save us no more,—in some measure draw a curtain round us, and indulge us with change, if not with relief. There is no more effort to be made—no more appearance to be kept up—no more work to be done:—life must

pause :—and there are those who, with me, will acknowledge the value and the privilege of enforced pause.—And when sleep is won, even the man whose life is to end on the morrow, has cause to say, "Blessed be night."

When my wife and myself were alone, we could not help exchanging a few words of deep mutual thankfulness to God, who had given us so upright and so kindly a little daughter as ours; and who had cast her lot (as it seemed) in such pleasant waters. Our Martha had been touched, stilled, and deepened, by Rosamond's generosity, as one of a poor nature never could have been;—but she had also felt the fervour of the pulse of her benefactress—had touched the passion of her hope—had foreseen the shadowy nature of her dream, to a degree which was marvellous in one so young. What our daughter felt, and touched, and foresaw, she could not have put into words; but it was something to go to rest on the eve of the first wedding-day of a child of ours—and to be so sure that all was so well with her—not well merely as to money, but as to heart and brain, and prospect of usefulness.

Well, if these sort of thoughts (fond

dreams! unmarried folks may say)—were our lullabies—our *reveillé* on the wedding-morning was, after its kind, yet more fanciful. I will not say that we slept late; but we did not wake so soon as younger people, with less untired nerves, must have done, on the eve of so many events. My impression on waking was, that I was in a conservatory among orange-flowers, roses, and *stephanotis*, and hyacinths.—Our house is small—kept very warm—and I am singularly susceptible to scents. There was—no doubt could exist on the matter—there was a positive garden of hot-house treasures somewhere about us.—"The Count's sending," was my wife's comment, who did not know how little Italians prize flower scents.

Whoever had sent it, before we could show ourselves our children were open-mouthed about the great tin box which had arrived, directed to Miss Martha—a box the like whereof had never before been seen in Halcyon Row. Bouquets for every one—for both brides—for my wife—for Martha's three sisters—even for good Nelkson, who got up in a state of hysterical crying ecstasy—and presented herself, my wife says, with

the brooch at the back of her collar—and a heap of miscellaneous flowers of magnificent beauty for the breakfast table.

"'Tis all very well," said Rosamond's poor maid to me—who could not pass me without a gush of tears, and a little private conference. "But I was with the young ladies when the lid was lifted up. That's no Italian's bringing or buying (for one must pay for flowers with ready money)—and on the outside of the box was a '*Hess*,' and in the interior a '*Shepherd*,' scratched out. O, sir! had it pleased Fate to direct my lady's affections that way—should I feel the load on my mind that I do now on leaving her?—I should *not*—if I was to be put in the pillory, like John Guy, for saying the reverse."

As there could be a doubt from whom the flowers came, my wife insisted that no mention of the tell-tale inscription should be made to Rosamond—being a little disturbed in her mind, as she owned, by what worked so like an act of perseverance. She had dreamed in the night of scenes in the church, of Rosamond carried out pale, and covered with blood—and was more nervous and more disposed to be unreasonable than is her habit.

"Supposing," so ran her active invention, "that Mr. Shepherd should be set on by those horrible Liverpool women to do some mischief, and impede the marriage!—Nelkson believes he is in Manchester."

"Nelkson believes every body is in Manchester," was my reply—a snappish one, I confess. "Surely, have we not enough to do before twelve o'clock, without conjuring up disasters and dreams? If the worst comes to the worst, Mrs. Marshall will have a hysteric in church. She all but said the other night that she could hardly think it was a proper hearty wedding where nobody fainted; but if you trouble your mind with *that*, I shall think very meanly of your understanding—Well . . . what now?—Am I never to get shaved to-day?"

It was a voice at the door, with a letter from London—marked "private and immediate."

"Some memorandum from Mr. Bessell," I dare say, said I—"just look, dear, from whom it is while I finish."

"Not from Mr. Bessell, at all events—and it is such curious writing! I can't make it out—a foreigner's apparently." I left my

chin unfinished, and snatched the letter. Mrs. Bell was right—it was from no Englishman.

The reader would not care for a copy of the contents—written in a jargon which it was not easy for any of us to understand—merely an outpouring of the most filthy and virulent abuse against Count Roccabella, who was accused by the writer of every sort of wicked deeds and base purpose. He was a traitor, it said—he was a man who had stolen money, who would brutally treat women—who had murdered one—"*Ask him whether the body of Marietta has been yet found at Barlassina; but warn him that she is not forgotten by her friends, as he will one day find —Ask him what he has paid to the Princess Morgenstern (the successor of Marietta) for her silence and connivance; and to help her to buy a new lover handsomer than he. Show this to the rich and generous Englishwoman, whom this villain has enticed to marry him, with the view of securing her vast wealth! Tell her to turn back, if even she is at the altar's foot—before it is too late!—and remind her that she who weds a marked man, and an assassin, is thereby marked, too, and may expect to share the retri-*

*bution which will at no distant period overtake him!*"

This choice production, from which I have omitted its more offensive portions, was signed "Well-known." Beneath its signature was the dusky reddish print of a thumb, which had been dipped, I believe, in blood.

"The merest, most outrageous malignity in the world! The miserable animal does not know that the Count is marrying a poor woman; and he wishes to make mischief." But I laid by the letter, because the mystery of it would, we thought, be as safe in my strong box as among dust and ashes. I trusted with all my heart that Rosamond had not been insulted by a similar diabolical production; and more than once in the course of the morning, busied as we all were with graver calls, caught myself saying, as I looked at Count Roccabella, "That man has never treated women brutally; but it is as well that I know how falsely he is accused of making a match for money, or I might have been uneasy at the rest of the hideous charges."

There was much to do, for Rosamond had to be married twice. My wife had said

"Humph!" at the mention of the Romish ceremony, remembering that one of the Italian patriot's fixed ideas was to abolish Papal superstition. But the good woman had to become acquainted with human inconsistency; and afterwards, I know, belaboured Mrs. Rick with it as a case of conscience, only to be disparaged by persons that fancied no people had any right to be attached to any form of worship save one. She had backed out of going to St. Veronica's, however, with the bridal party; and for bridesmaid there, Rosamond must needs put up with our eldest daughter—a good creature, but without a spark of imagination, who, being very deaf, my wife said, could not be tampered with. We three went together—the Count and his friend were to meet us at the chapel. "It seems such an age since I met Salvatore, cousin," said Rosamond, "though it is only three weeks;" and I saw that as the moment drew near she became more nervous than I thought possible, and kept repeating to herself, "To think of my being married in a Roman Catholic chapel! Is it a bad omen, do you think? Never mind, we shall have a spell to control

it. Yes, yes; I see him at the door, looking so tired, poor fellow; and no wonder, with this horrid Lancashire weather . . . . . O cousin, cousin! whatever happens, do not let me make a fool of myself! How good it is of you to leave your own child to take care of me!"

Natural as would have been any confusion, I was struck not altogether pleasantly by the sudden queenly calmness of manner for which Rosamond exchanged her flurry of spirits so soon as the bridegroom presented himself.

As to the Count, my impression was that we should have an opera-scene acted by him under St. Veronica's porch ere we had leave to enter out of the cold. He did kiss both our hands. Had he flung himself at her feet in the mud, I should not have been amazed. He covered her with all manner of gracious and caressing epithets—he was about to lead her in with a dancing step, when his "best man" said, "Pray, present me to the lady."

"O yes! Rosamond, my own, this is Valpiquet—Valpiquet, Mr. Bell!"

I should be puzzled to explain why I was disagreeably impressed with Count Rocca-

bella's friend; but I have rarely experienced so much discomfort from the presence of any person as I did from that of M. Valpiquet. I had always fancied that patriotism must mean something generous, noble, and impulsive, if a little wrongheaded—and it did not occur to me till afterwards, that he had given me the impression of a spy—but so it was. He was so much too well-mannered without being highly bred—not servile precisely in his behaviour to the bridegroom—but not attending to him as English friend does to friend—solicitously, but without show. And was it fancy, that he appeared particularly to object being looked at by Rosamond—that he ducked and dived, and evaded her eye—as if there was in it a spark of Ithuriel's detecting power? One could only have imagined him to be a foreigner, because he spoke English more correctly than any native. He had not come down to Manchester, it seemed, expressly for the wedding—since he mentioned that he was *en route* for Marbleton, near ———, where himself and Mr. Shepherd were that day expected to dinner. The last name made Rosamond start; but as it was spoken we

were within the chapel—and there was no time to pursue it further.

The rite was soon over; but while it was passing, I felt as if a first barrier was put up betwixt the bride and her own people, and her own country. Something of the same notion had crossed her own mind; for it had been her own express stipulation that no one—not even the faithful Nelkson, who would have followed her with nosegay and pocket-handkerchief, on Mr. Blosse's arm, into a synagogue, or a mosque, or a Quaker's meeting-house—should attend her to chapel.

"I will take the veil in a corner," she said laughingly—"since, of course, I am going to become Roman Catholic! And I will be made a show of during the heretic ceremony."

But it was an ill-considered speech of M. Valpiquet—who probably did not even pretend to any religion—as we were getting into the carriages to make our way to All Saints', where Martha's wedding was also to be solemnized—to congratulate the Countess Roccabella on being "half-married"—"And here, madam," continued he, "I had almost better take my leave of you—since my travelling companion, Mr. Shepherd, bar-

gained to wait only as late as half-past twelve —being, like myself, engaged to dine at Marbleton."

"O, that good Shepherd will not stir from Manchester, be sure," said Roccabella, "till he has seen Rosamond married, and out of his reach for ever! He is what you French, Valpiquet, would call *preux chevalier!*"

"Mr. Shepherd again!" said Rosamond, checking herself suddenly in the expression of her irritation; then she turned to her *bouquet*. "Where was it, Salvatore, that you managed to find these magnificent summer flowers for me?" . . . The Count and Valpiquet exchanged looks, and the finger of the former covered his lip, with a furtive glance at me. He need not have fancied that I was going to be indiscreet. Had I been so, I might have expressed my surprise at his cordial acquiescence in such an act of chivalry, on the part of a defeated rival. But instead, I made an observation on Mr. Oxley's new patent for heating greenhouses, which occupied the distance betwixt St. Veronica's Chapel and All Saints' Church not so badly—considering that I hardly knew what I was saying.

Certainly, to have to go through three marriage ceremonies in one morning, was enough to make even a practised man of no feeling, nervous—and what with Liverpool sisters-in-law, and terrible anonymous letters —and Rosamond's lovers, old and new—I had a sort of hot and cold feeling—a creeping of presentiment that we should not get out of All Saints' without a scene.—But I was little prepared for what we did find there!

That old, selfish Mrs. Marshall (I *must* call her so) had seemingly acquiesced in all that her son and ourselves and Martha had agreed on; but she was like other women, after all—had first made her fight, rendering us all uncomfortable;—had then said "yes," in a manner which rendered us more uncomfortable still;—and after all had absolutely taken her own way. It was she, we are convinced, who had absolutely encouraged her gossips to leave their warm houses, on that wretched December morning, merely to see Martha married, and to stare at the Countess Roccabella; though they all viciously regarded her as a spoil-sport, whose intrusion made havoc of every thing jovial

and neighbourly that ought to have gone on.—She had instituted hot elder wine and toast at her own house, immediately after our breakfast,—where Louis and Martha were to repair, "since Mr. Bell was so much taken up with his grand relation;" and at all events, had come out in battle rather than bridal array, she looked so gloomy—Mrs. Brudge, who had friends staying with her, and thought proper to bring them likewise, Mr. and Mrs. Spindleton—the former with his ear-trumpet, and the three Misses Le Grand in their shivering summer bonnets of yellow silk stuck over with corn-flowers: and many many others whom it is needless to mention were there. Mrs. Bell was with her daughter; and if a pinched-up mouth could slay, hers would have slain the "other co-parent on the occasion" (to employ the phrase used by Nelkson in describing Mrs. Marshall to Mr. Blosse—her humble servant). All the women began mopping and mowing and whispering among themselves when Rosamond came in.

But "all the women," included more than Mrs. Marshall's playfellows.—No sooner had we crossed the threshold than I saw, at

a glance, Rosamond's intolerable sisters-in-law. Both were mightily excited, and nodded and gossiped and whispered so loud, that an imperative "*Hush!*" from a stranger was required to remind them (saintly Mrs. Rick being one) that they were within the walls of a place of worship.—I do not think that Rosamond saw them, nor indeed would it have mattered if she had.

Every one has known some occasion of the kind, when the jar of comparatively small accidents has been so confusing as to leave no time or space for grave emotion. I have seen grief hurried out of its place at a funeral, to come back with a more terrible flood afterwards—I have seen the breathless anxiety attending a struggle for death or life in a court of justice, utterly suspended,—by some worthless accidental interruption. As my wife said afterwards, the two weddings put one another out.—Our good old friend the curate of St. Simon's, who officiated, was any thing but deliberate on the occasion; and indeed Louis and Martha, Mrs. Bell further asserted, did all but marry themselves. I was struck, nevertheless, with the seemingly close attention devoted to the

prayerbook by Count Roccabella's groom's-man, M. Valpiquet; and also with the shaven cleanliness of that gentleman's cheek and chin. The waving to-and-fro of the Misses Le Grand's yellow bonnets disturbed me a little. I have been told that I did some very absent things,—that I dropped my hat four times; and when Mr. Vavasour asked Count Roccabella, whether he would take Rosamond for his wedded wife, that I answered, "No certainly," and begged pardon aloud the next instant. But these are children's tales.

Somehow or other it got over . . . and my wife, who declares that she never till that day knew what self-command could accomplish, did not faint;—though the convulsive hold she laid on my arm at one part of the ceremony (I forget which) left a black mark for weeks.—We all crowded into the small mouldy vestry, Mrs. Marshall's acquaintances among the rest—and there was kissing and congratulation, and eyes sharp as needles fixed on one bride, and the hand of the other wrung off by her mother-in-law's good old friends: until Louis, who is a short man, seemed half-stifled, and,

cold as the morning was, asked for a glass of water.

"Madam," said Mr. Oliphant of Liverpool, my co-trustee, to some one behind us, "you are pushing me very violently—Pray, do not attempt to speak to Madame Roccabella at present. This is most ill timed!"

"And why is it ill-timed, sir? I may congratulate my brother's wife on the noble and fascinating successor she has given to him, I hope—without asking your leave, sir! since we are not in Italy, sir! where inquisitions are to be found; no, nor in any popish vestry, but in an honest Lancashire church! Pushing! and why not, I should like to know, when such as you stop the way?" And the thumping, and lunging, and pressing forward continued very much as if a bale of cotton was attempting to come forward on its own account—by which Miss Adeliza Le Grand was absolutely propelled into the arms of M. Valpiquet: and emitted a little shriek, which had the good effect of withdrawing attention from Rosamond.

I whispered the clergyman and the clerk: but their intervention was not heeded. "This is even worse than that vulgar be-

haviour during service," said a clear gentlemanly voice, which was strange to me. "The Countess shall be annoyed by no such proceedings, and if the foreign gentlemen feel scrupulous, I don't. The person is in a state of intemperance, and must be removed. Madam, if you will not be quiet while the registers are signed, I will take you out on my own responsibility!"

"Sister," whispered a honeyed tone, which I knew better, "why will you give way to your feelings? Dear as is the memory of our noble brother" . . . . . and then, in the midst of the jumble and changing of places, I seemed to hear some confused talk about "great power," and "a wicked bay-tree."

"Upon my word," said the owner of the strange voice to me, "if Mrs. Westwood's connexions behave so abominably as that person has done throughout the service, it is enough, and more than enough, to account for any thing unusual on her own part. A moment, good Mrs. Nelkson, if you please. Come, madam, as you will not conduct yourself like a lady you shall not stay here—I shall put you into your carriage,"—and that the active speaker did absolutely oblige Mrs.

Chidley out of the vestry ere further disturbance could be made, and we presume got her into some coach or other,—was evident by the sudden peace which seemed to prevail, and from the fact that her violence troubled the proceedings of the day no further.

"She is a mad, my dear," said Roccabella; "we laugh at her! Be sure she don't come back no more. No, and see, here's our brave Shepherd!—Come, good friend . . . my lady is always obliged to you. Come here—you shall bring us good-luck; you shall sign—here betwixt Valpiquet and Mr. Bell, and (something that stood for *Marshall*) and Mr. Bell, my dear—please—I have ask him to breakfast wiz you."

"Am I wanted?" replied the voice, and the speaker came forward through the little crowd. "Sign! certainly—where? Any where—O, here? The person has gone home, and, judging from the state in which she is, will have an illness—I think very probable—and the sleek lady is gone, too; to take care of her.—Nay, I only ventured to interfere because I was nearest to the door. Pray, forget all about it! Countess, I beg

respectfully to wish you health and prosperity. May God bless you, and make you happy!"

Could Rosamond have believed that if she was to cry on her wedding-day—the man to make her cry would have been that Mr. Shepherd?—It was done though, and he did it; and she cried, and he made as if he did not see it. Turning quickly on me he said, however, in an under tone, "I can't breakfast with you for many reasons," and more loudly—"I must be excused, because if M. Valpiquet and I miss the train, we shall not get to Marbleton till two in the morning. Are you ready, M. Valpiquet? Come then, pray—every additional person is only in the way."

And, somehow or other, M. Valpiquet was extricated out of the confused group of the guests, bidden and unbidden, to the couple of weddings—and the two disappeared without fuss, without delay, without awkwardness. I never heard a man pronounce so correctly as Mr. Shepherd.

Well:—then we were to get back to Halcyon Row somehow, and (now that he was gone) every thing seemed to fall into

confusion. How Count Roccabella was stuffed into the coach with poor old Mrs. Marshall, none of us could even tell. But the two made fast friends betwixt the vestry door and the breakfast table—and he upbraided *her* for not having invited all the world to witness his happiness. I stuck by Rosamond; in what company my wife was delivered at our own house, she was loth to communicate—but it proved to have been in the society of Mrs. Nelkson and Mr. Blosse.

At home, however, we were, and, thank God! with both couples married. And then there was that sitting down to breakfast at which every one is expected to eat, drink, and be merry—though I cannot understand how any one with a particle of heart can have the smallest appetite for either good cheer or gaiety.—Mrs. Marshall, however, proved ready for both—having, as I said, been conquered in the coach by the Italian, whom she persisted in calling Mr. Boccarella. She was not, however, permitted to sit as long as would have been agreeable; but was reminded of her hot elder wine and toast, and those whom she had

been ill-advised enough to invite to partake of the same—and in no very lively state of satisfaction, she was shipped off with Louis and Martha. My wife and I were to follow them presently, but there was first some business to be done—although never did man seem less disposed or composed for business than the Italian bridegroom.

"Now, Mr. Bell, my dear—my wife she lose her money when she marry me, that is fixed,—what consequence any thing further? What matter who get it? You some, I hope —It make her nervous," he added in a whisper, "to hear of that horrid old man. We shall have always enough to get on upon somehow, for I defy those Jesuits to poison my own people against me before I am back at home again—and *then!*"

It was necessary to be peremptory, and to insist on going through with our task. Neither Rosamond nor Count Roccabella could be excused a syllable of what might be contained in those sealed instructions. Indeed Mr. Oliphant felt, and said as much, that we had acted rashly, in not having also requested the presence of Count Roccabella's friend, M. Valpiquet; on every account it

was to be wished that all explanations should be as complete as possible.

"Valpiquet, indeed!—On contrary, I glad! I not allow him to know my affairs, I promise you! He is better where he is, riding away with that good Shepherd.—Rosamond, my angel, you have never asked where I am going to take you, for the days we are stop in London—Where you think? not to be with Madame Montegrone, I do hope; and hotel so noisy, and cost so much. Park street better—we go Park street, the very next door. That good Shepherd would have it! He lend us his house, and only made me promise I would not tell you, till all was settled. You sat by his fire before this, he said, and he laughed as he said it.

"O Salvatore!" cried Rosamond, in a quick tone, "I wish you had not . . . . . It is." . . .

"Truly handsome conduct on the part of Mr. Shepherd," cut in my wife—"the behaviour of a thorough English gentleman;" but I could tell by her tone that something annoyed her too in the transaction:—if not the offer, evidently it might then be the

acceptance of it!—But Rosamond was not prepared to find any thing wrong which Salvatore did; and thus only protested feebly, where, under other circumstances, she would have contested the matter or refused point blank.

"You will be so much quieter there," said he, "so much better in every respect. I tell you, little woman, you have nothing with the matter! *You* were not invited—it is I; and now you belong to me, you and all you have in the world—and so you must go where I go. That good Shepherd is as delicate as never was . . . And here is Mr. Elephant with large paper sealed. If we must listen, we must—Mr. Bell, my dear, ask him to read quickness." And down sate the handsome Italian, keeping Rosamond's hand fast, with the impatient air of a child at a sermon. Yet every faculty was on the alert; for though, while in town, Rosamond's bridegroom, we subsequently learned, had paid a visit to Mr. Bessell, and acquainted himself with the main fact of Mr. Westwood's will—and the precise figure to which the poor remains of Rosamond's fortune amounted—who knew but there

might be some turn—some outlet—some condition worth attending to ?

None such, however, there was . . . nothing on which Italian ingenuity could build the least possible expectation. Mr. Bessell had not come down from London for nothing ! Did his coming, and the midnight conversation after, not recur to Rosamond when the seal was broken—that large inelegant desk seal, which she so well knew, and with which the mystical paper had been closed up by careful hands, now mouldering in the tomb? I know that it brought back the dead man to me, as if he had been among us, in that very room—with his heavy sorrowful face, and his loaded eyelids, and his slow voice, and his silent, unprofessing care for that wayward, brilliant creature ! Even Mr. Oliphant, of all solicitors the least sentimental, showed a touch of emotion and remembrance, as he said, "Our poor friend, had always an objection to many words.—There is little here to detain us; for this enclosure," taking out as he spoke another sealed paper, "has reference to other circumstances than those of the day."

In the fewest words possible, the charities

were specified which were to reap the benefit which Rosamond had derived from the money settled on her, in case Rosamond contracted a second marriage; and the precise sums were so prescribed, as to make it clear that no distributor could, if he willed, derive any per centage from it. No less stringent was a clause excluding, now, henceforth, and for ever, Mrs. Chidley and Mrs. Rick, or any one belonging to them, from the slightest interference, or the most distant prospect of inheriting a penny. "I have acted from no caprice," was simply added, "in doing this—but with a view to the happiness and independence of my beloved wife. This I wish her to understand, when I am no more."

"Thank God, it is over!" said Rosamond after an instant's pause, when Mr. Oliphant had ceased; "and now, Salvatore, I belong to you, and to you only."

"And to Italy! my dearest wife!"

END OF VOL. I.

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